

CRISIS COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

(1st edition)



**Editor:
Delia Pop-Flanja**

Presa Universitară Clujeană

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CRISIS COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

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Whereas studies on communication in crisis contexts are numerous and substantial (among the most prominent - Benoit, 1995; Witte, 2001, and Coombs, 2006), the current COVID-19 health crisis has caused a disruption of classical interpretative templates, and a reconsideration of the way in which the communication strategies of different actors are applied and interpreted is necessary.

Apart from the pandemic and its effects, we can unquestionably talk about an infodemic that people are widely exposed to. Whether it is misinformation or disinformation that they have to deal with, governments and state officials, as well as public and private institutions, have attempted to limit the vulnerability of the public to these factors, whilst trying to convince people to take the recommended steps to limit the spread and impact of the virus. The United Kingdom Government, for instance, collaborated with the World Health Organization in order to fight against the infodemic, through a series of communication campaigns such as “Stop the Spread”, which aired on BBC World and encouraged people to double check information, “Reporting Misinformation”, or social media infographics that focused on vaccine safety (WHO, 27 April 2021).

Fighting against false information is even more difficult in the context in which freedom of expression can be perceived as limited by the measures taken by governments. For example, the “Désinfox Coronavirus” service, set up by the French Government with the purpose of fact-checking articles on COVID-19, was withdrawn a few days after it was launched as many journalists criticized it for being a form of press censorship (The Senate of France, 2020). Hence, we consider that the strategy of educating the public on the reliable sources and of building trust, although that

requires a lengthy endeavour, can be a more appropriate approach than restraining access to false information.

Acknowledging that disinformation on COVID-19 was a major problem and that media freedom and freedom of expression should be protected as well, the European Union took steps towards supporting the industry even from March 2020, when a 5.1 million euro funding was available for projects that “identify and prevent violations of press freedom, detect risks to pluralism and support cross-border investigations”. However, awareness was raised on the situation in the Asia-Pacific region, where, according to a 2020 Reporters Without Borders report, the biggest increase in press freedom violations was registered, and on the one in Middle East and North Africa, which were reported as being the most dangerous places for journalists (European Parliament, 2020).

In February 2021, the World Health Organization published a research agenda (WHO, 2021) for ensuring access to reliable health-related information. One of the conclusions resulting from the discussion that took place in the context of setting the agenda, was the importance of identifying the situations where information is missing, as those gaps can be easily filled in by false information. The way communities are being perceived should also change, as they are not only geographically driven and should not be addressed only locally, but can also represent people that share common values or goals, regardless of their physical proximity. Top-down approaches are considered insufficient and empathetic, relationship-building ones are deemed necessary. Another recommendation was to include in the academic curricula elements that contribute to information literacy and develop skills such as critical thinking and slow thinking.

However, as unprecedented as it may be perceived, is it a *black swan* type of crisis that we are dealing with nowadays? The theory of *black swan* events was introduced by Nassim Nicholas Taleb to describe a historic, unpredictable event, characterized by “rarity, extreme impact, and retrospective (though not prospective) predictability” (Taleb, 2007: xviii). Taleb questions the accuracy of the human mind when evaluating history, because of three main conditions: “the illusion of understanding”, “the retrospective distortion”, and “the overevaluation of factual information” (Taleb, 2007: 8). So, if even the interpretation of history is influenced by perception, we can safely presume that crisis situations are also likely to be subjectively interpreted.

Addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, Taleb considers pandemics cannot be qualified as *black*, but as *white swan events*, and the only *black swan* aspect of the current pandemic is the fact that, in the context of the strong connectivity nowadays, we did not have such an event for almost 100 years. He also highlights some positive effects of this pandemic, such as the more effective use of technology or the crisis being an indicator of future performances of states (Taleb, 2021). Nonetheless, in spite of the crisis being more or less predictable, and even more or less predicted, it is still characterized by rarity and a great impact, and the expectations that people have from decision-makers are different.

In one of his most recent analyses on COVID-19 crisis communication, Timothy Coombs (Coombs, 2020) shared Taleb's view that the current pandemic is not a *black swan* crisis, as infectious disease-related pandemics are not unique and will most probably occur in the future as well. However, he states that the current crisis has led to some realizations that should contribute to a better management of similar situations, such as the recognition of the importance of effective communication for public-sector organizations, the strong predisposition to misinformation, or the diversity of channels that should be used to communicate with the public.

A 2020 UNESCO report on the role of intercultural dialogue and the socio-cultural impact of COVID-19 informed on several findings that are relevant to the way in which communication should be conducted in this context. Among those findings, note should be taken of changes such as the emerging of new forms of discrimination (e.g., against Asians or people of Asian descent), an increase in anti-immigrants and anti-foreigners attitudes, an amplification of social inequalities and vulnerabilities, and even an improper adaptation to the needs of international students (Mansouri, UNESCO, 2020). Hence, since new conflicts can arise from the changes that were generated by the pandemic, the promotion and reinforcement of cross-cultural and inter-community solidarity and dialogue is deemed necessary in order to turn interconnectivity disadvantages into advantages.

As previously stated, in crisis situations and in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, good communication and conflict resolution strategies are important aspects that cannot be disregarded. In order to address these challenges and to offer academics, researchers and students an opportunity to share their latest research results in the fields of: Crisis

and Risk Communication, Discourse Analysis, Intercultural Education, Conflict Transformation and Resolution, Political Communication, Institutional and Corporate Communication or Mass-media Communication, the 2021 edition of the international conference *Crisis Communication and Conflict Resolution* was organized by the Faculty of European Studies and the Center for Academic Success of Babeş-Bolyai University.

Apart from the prestigious participants specialized in various research domains that presented their papers at this event, two keynote speakers particularized the topics of conflict and crisis communication to the framework of the conference, namely W. Timothy Coombs, crisis communication scholar and author of the renowned *Situational Crisis Communication Theory*, and Adrian Lesenciuc, Professor of Communication and Military Sciences and president of the Braşov branch of the Romanian Writers' Union. Some of the most insightful scientific papers presented at the conference can be consulted in the following chapters.

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THE PRINCIPLE OF COMMUNICATING VESSELS. TERRORISM AS A FORM OF COMMUNICATION AND ITS HYDRODYNAMIC BALANCE WITH MEDIA

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ABSTRACT: The media and terrorist organizations operate, from the perspective of their relationships to the public, within the limits of the same logic: the logic of the market. Balancing demand and supply in the symbolic market, terrorist organizations use their reprehensible actions as acts of public communication, trying to transform the market of information into a market of terror. The understanding of terrorist acts as acts of communication is due to the perspective of Rodrigo Alsina (1991). The reciprocal of this theorem: media understood as a weapon of terror, or having a role in amplifying terror, was later accepted and widely used. In this context, the theory of the media-terrorism symbiosis emerged – an inadequate metaphor in explaining the connections between the players on the market of terror – and, later, the theory of unstable balance. Terrorism diversified in terms of communicative actions due to the appearance and extension of social networks/ new media, transforming terrorist organizations into updated versions of themselves. Through this article, we set out to launch a new interpretative perspective or framework concerning the relationship between media and terrorism, i.e. a theoretical approach on the principle of communication vessels/ hydrodynamic balance applied to information flows. In accordance with this vision on media-terrorism communication relations, we chose to perform an analysis of the media coverage of the terrorist actions of Daesh in the initial version of territorial expansion or of the Caliphate (Daesh 1.0), respectively, in the subsequent version of the virtual Caliphate’s network expansion (Daesh 2.0).

Keywords: communication; terrorism; media; symbiosis; hydrodynamic balance; principle of communicating vessels; critical media consciousness.

INTRODUCTION

Five years after the attack that radically changed the perspective on terrorism and led to the emergence of the first "War on terror", Rowman &

Littlefield Publishing House publishes a work dedicated exclusively to the relationship between terrorism and the media on the new coordinates: *Media, Terrorism, and Theory. A Reader* (Kavoori & Fraley, 2006). The authors of the book's chapters have chosen not to focus on the logic of symbiotic functionality of relationship, but on orientations, contexts (and genres) and analytical frameworks of the phenomenon. Furthermore, the role of social media or the narrative-counter-narratives competition was analyzed in the book's chapters.

Prior to the September 11 attacks, the perspective on media relations and terrorism had been exposed in various scientific texts, including the well-known works of Gabriel Weimann and Conrad Winn, *The Theater of Terror: Mass Media and International Terrorism* (1994) – based on an even older perspective of Brian Michael Jenkins', from 1974, – but distinct theories had already been developed by Wieviorka (1988) and Rodrigo Alsina (1991). Media-terrorism relationships have been analyzed and reflected in individual works, such as those belonging to Garcin-Marrou (2007), Barnett & Reynolds (2009), Simons (2010), Wiechert (2017), Marthoz (2017), Krona & Pennington (2019), but without elaborating distinct theories in relation with them. In summary, the relationship between terrorism and the media is most often debated in accordance with another relationship, between national security systems and media institutions. In the case of national security systems, the logic is the one of protecting the entire state; in the latter, the media institutions are organized based on the logic of the market. The two systems are in constant interaction – the lessons of the Vietnam War and of the conflicts following the 1991 Gulf War are well known –, and the adjustments between them are made through a series of public policies and various levels of government control over the media. The media system and the terrorist organizations are players within the limits of the same logic, of the market, which involves the meeting of supply and demand between the need for a media audience and the promotion of terrorist organizations. The media have a number of constraints derived from relationships with the national security system, but the media and terrorist organizations are actors on the same symbolic market, which terrorists are trying to turn into a *market of terror*.

THE MARKET OF TERROR

The market of terror implies the existence of a third actor with whom the previously two mentioned actors interact or try to interact: the audience. In the media-terrorist organizations-audience triangle, a series of relationships are established according to the quantity and quality of images (impregnated with terrorist symbolism) provided by the media, to the emotional reaction of the public and its appetite for shows, to the production and the promotion of violence and messages by terrorist organizations, into a continuum, into a loop that can lead to total control of terrorist organizations, in the absence of the control mechanisms.

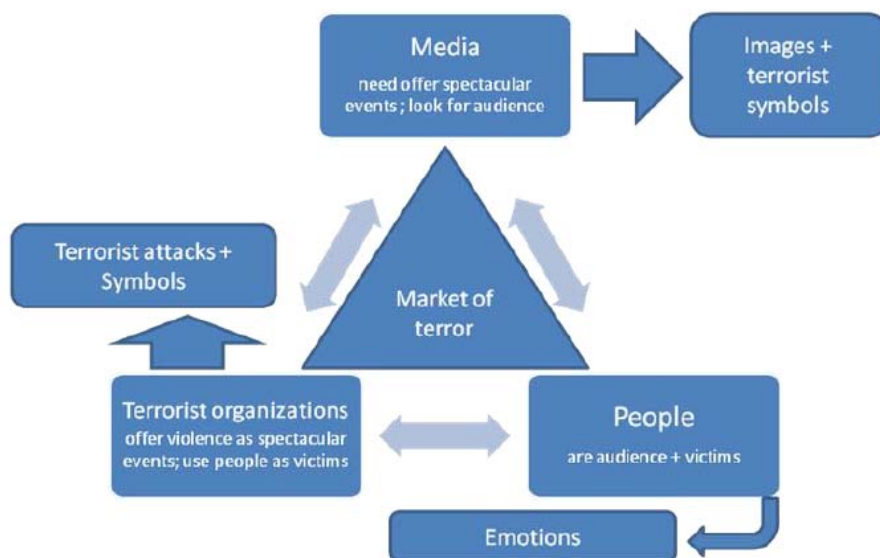


Figure 1. *The market of terror*

It is the state that intervenes, through the instruments belonging to the national security structures, and, to a large extent – at least in relation to the traditional media –, this adjustment is made. The media are aware of the possibility of terrorist organizations controlling media relations with their audiences and, in particular, the possibility of falling into the dangerous zone of offering support for terrorists. Terrorist organizations are aware of governmental control over media-terrorism relations. They are also aware that the media, although interested in spectacular events, are not partners

in transmitting terrorist messages and demands, but produce this conjectural transmission. From the perspective of understanding terrorist actions as real dramatizations (Weimann & Winn, 1994), and the terrorist manifestation as a form of political theater and realizing that “terrorists cannot control how audiences respond to violence, as they are presented by the media” (Wright-Neville, 2010, p. 35), it is certain that the elimination of terrorists from the previously mentioned triangle on the market of terror can be achieved only through public policies and public awareness.

Although media-terrorism relationships have evolved over the years close to establishing subtle relationships instead of those expressed by the market balance between “publicity-seeking terrorists and drama-seeking media” (Weimann, 2012, pp. 182-200), a series of studies on symbiotic relationship still prevails. These studies underline the symbiotic relations and the perspective according to which the terrorist actions are acts of mass communication (Rodrigo Alsina, 1991). Much more than that, there are researchers who consider that the reciprocal of ‘the Rodrigo-Alsina theorem’ is valid. Such interpretations can be dangerous as long as the media-terrorism relationship is characterized by a mutual need in relation to audiences as an audience (terrorists understand audiences in a dual role, and even turn media institutions into victims of terror), complemented by mutual distrust. The media and the terrorist organizations meet by chance on the symbolic market. From Rodrigo Alsina’s perspective, terrorist organizations use their own actions as acts of communication in order to use the media vehicle, but the media are more vulnerable than culpable. The most critical interpretation is that of the reciprocal of ‘Rodrigo Alsina’s theory’ is valid:

“The relationship [n.a. between media and terrorism] pre-exists, regardless of the interpretive model. Terrorism understood as communication through the media underlines a certain form of understanding of these mutually supportive relationships, unwanted by media organizations, but necessary in the game on the global market. The reciprocal of ‘Rodrigo Alsina's theorem’ is the understanding media as a weapon of terror, with a role in amplifying and multiplying the effects of terrorist attacks among the public.” (Lesenciuc, 2019b: 26)

However, in order to establish the limits within which the media-terrorism relations can be interpreted in accordance with a series of theoretical patterns from the field of communication sciences, it is necessary to review the main theories that design the relationship between media and terrorism.

THEORIES OF TRADITIONAL MEDIA - TERRORISM RELATIONSHIP. THE PRINCIPLE OF COMMUNICATING VESSELS

Following the order of their materialization, the first of the theories regarding the media-terrorism relationship is in regard to the symbiosis of the two entities. Starting from the perspective of the relations described by Rodrigo Alsina and from the classification of the two categories of media, culpable and vulnerable, the symbiosis theory can be reduced to the relationship of coexistence of entities based on common benefit according to these two possibilities:

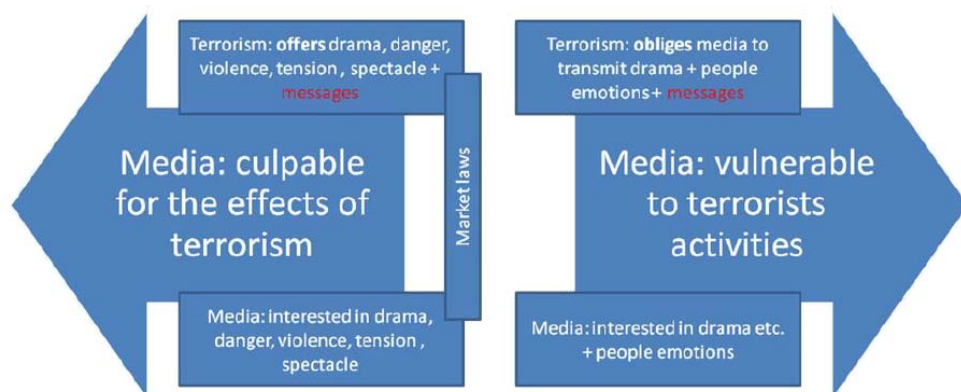


Figure 2. Models of Symbiosis Theory

In nature, the symbiotic relationships are not limited to two possibilities of coexistence. In the world of the living there are many classifications and, implicitly, many types of relationships of this type. Regarding the physical space of the interaction, there is the endo-symbiosis, an association in which one entity lives inside another, respectively ecto-symbiosis, in which the interaction is external. Regarding the integration of the symbiotic relationship, there are relationships included in the categories

of mutualism, commensalism and parasitism. The Turkish researcher Uğur Güngör (2019) from Baskent University was one of the first to ask: which of the types of symbiosis is applicable to this relationship between media and terrorism?

A more complex understanding of media-terrorism relations is the one proposed by the French researcher Michel Wieviorka (1988/2004, pp. 42-49), assuming four stages / hypostases of the relationship: I. the lack of any relationship; II. the indifference of the terrorist organization in relation to the media; III. the pro-media strategy, based on media interest in transmitting the effects of terrorist attacks and IV. the transformation of journalists into victims of terror.

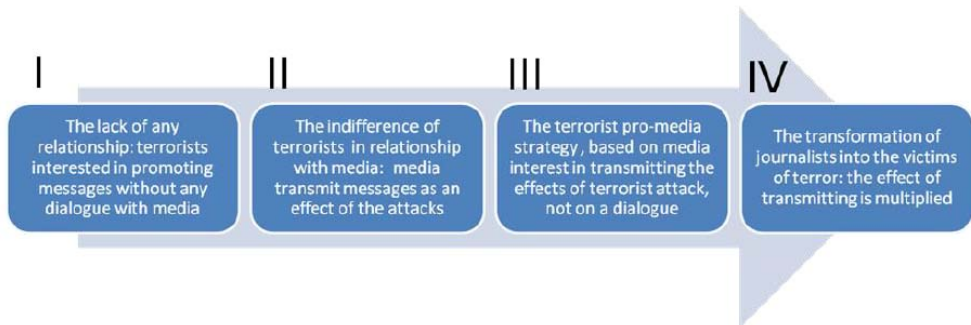


Figure 3. The stages of media-terrorism relationship from Michel Wieviorka's perspective

The gradual media-terrorism relationship brings into discussion rather a dynamic of the relationship, at some point in an unstable balance.

In fact, a theory of unstable balance was proposed by Dominik Rohner and Bruno S. Fey (2007: 129-145). The two economists considered the premise that on the symbolic market media earn image by reporting on terrorist attacks, and the exceptionality of reporting leads to a certain level of sensationalism¹. Rohner and Fey assigned a series of mathematical

¹ There are at least four traditions in media information: I. actual, neutral and equidistant, factual and documented information; II. delivery of sensational content; III. transmission of narratives (and counter-narratives) and IV. the didactic approach, based on the design of Robert C. Picard (according to Garcin-Marrou, 2005: 104-105). The purely sensationalist perspective on the transmission of information limits the applicability of the study to the particular case of this tradition of information, in which "this representation of violence appeals to the sensibilities present in civil society and, as its name suggests, media construction is based on individuals" (Garcin-Marrou, 2005:104-105).

relations to the situations under consideration, resulting in graphs of the entities in the so-called 'common-interest-game' which involves a series of potential balance points, depending on a number of predefined parameters. One of the partial conclusions of this theory of unstable balance, based on the symbiotic perspective on the media-terrorism relationship, is the following:

"Terrorist attacks are a particular form of communication by terrorist groups. The media are used as a platform for securing a broad dissemination of the terrorists' ideology. The media benefit from terrorism, as reports of terror attacks increase newspapers sales and the number of television viewer." (Rohner & Fey, 2007: 144)

The theory of the unstable balance has two limits: on the one hand the theory is the result of research regarding the traditional media; on the other hand, the balance position is reached for other reasons than those taken into account by the two researchers:

"This metaphor is somewhat unsatisfactory, because the media are pushed into the equilibrium position for other reasons than those that determine the balance of the media - terrorist organizations. In addition, the change in the perspective of the media in order to shift the balance with the terrorist organizations should not be seen in the light of a different understanding of the terrorist phenomenon. The change of perspective means, in fact, a re-understanding and taking social responsibility by the media. Different forces act on the two entities. They reach an accidentally unstable balance and return to their original state not by reflecting the causes, not for economic reasons. Even if such possibilities existed, they would be regulated in time by government control of the media, in non-authoritarian democratic countries, within the limits of social responsibility." (Lesenciuc, 2019c, p. 20)

Given these limits of the application of the theory of unstable balance, starting with 2018, we proposed a different perspective in terms of media-terrorism relationship, explainable through the principle of communicating vessels: Lesenciuc & Munteanu (2018); Lesenciuc (2019a); Lesenciuc (2019b); Lesenciuc (2019c); Lesenciuc (2020). This principle, initially understood within the limits of hydrostatic balance, was interpreted in relation to hydrodynamic balance, starting from the physical phenomenon summarized by Blaise Pascal: in two interconnected vessels, the liquid level is the same. Let us associate the unstable liquid in the connected vessels or containers with the information flow. The terrorist organization and the media are in a direct connection based on the logic of the market. The explanation of the media-terrorism relationship becomes simple:

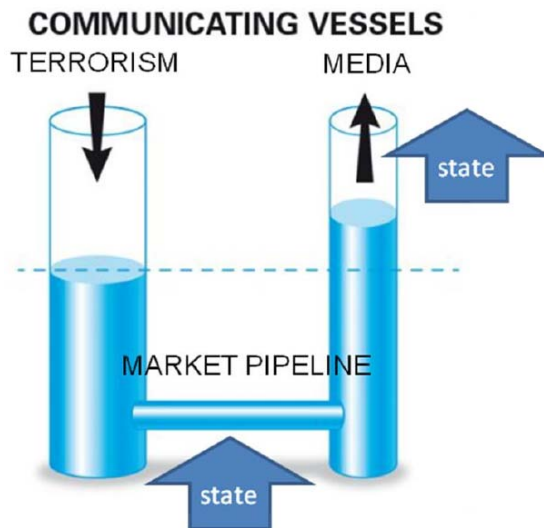


Figure 4. *The principle of communicating vessels in hydrodynamic balance in media-terrorism relationships*

“Based on this logic, as long as the terrorist organizations provide the raw material for the media, the attack that has the minimum level of "sensational" reached by the connecting pipe between the two vessels, the media will reflect the attack. Normally, there is a low level of fluid between the two vessels, which is in a so-called hydrostatic balance. The terrorist attack is the exceptional case of the pressure exerted in one vessel, pointed out in the other

vessel connected to the first through the market pipe. The hydrodynamic balance is the one that most adequately characterizes the media-terrorism relationship: the fluid content called 'sensational' (on which a certain pressure is exerted by the need of the terrorist organization to transmit terrorist messages and symbols, to communicate claims), is taken by the media and amplified. As soon as the pressure is no longer exerted, the media will no longer reflect / amplify the terrorist organization's messages." (Lesenciuc, 2020, p. 26)

The functionality of this unstable hydrodynamic balance (having in mind the association between information flows and the liquid in the connectivity between the two vessels/ entities) can be graphically highlighted (fig. 4). Summarizing, based on this principle, when the terrorist attack is the exceptional case of the pressure exerted into the terrorist-media vessel, the pressure will be transferred to media. The principle is functional when using the traditional media, but it requires a number of interpretive adjustments to the new media. Consequently, a reinterpretation of the theories and models in terms of communication through traditional media is needed to the current communication framework, of the prevalence of the new media.

FROM TRADITIONAL MEDIA TO NEW MEDIA. INTERPRETIVE PATTERNS DERIVED FROM CLASSICAL MEDIA THEORIES AND MODELS

Regarding the exploitation of the new media to serve terrorist purposes, Bruce Kopfelstein (2006, p. 109) defines "new and emerging media" as „electronic technologies that enable the creation, storage, and transmission of digital media content from point to point or point to multipoint", a perspective that includes both virtual group communication (which was already the subject of the new media analysis, through social networks) and virtual interpersonal communication (point to point). New and emerging media include, therefore, websites, blogs, vlogs, streaming / multicasting channels, social networks (Facebook, Twitter, ВКонтакте / VKontakte, Instagram etc.), groups in WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram, Discord, Keybase, Threema, chat rooms, but also telephony, e-mail, Internet

telephony in different social media networks. The ubiquity of the Internet Protocol (IP) in the case of new media, respectively of IP multimedia system (IMS) in the case of emerging media allows unlimited expansion of networks. To understand the complexity of new and emerging media, it is useful to focus on one of the interpretive models applicable to the classical media, proposed by Marten Brouwer in his doctoral dissertation defended at the University of Amsterdam, in 1968, "Stereotypes als folklore". Continuing the direction opened by Paul Lazarsfeld's research of 1940 – albeit, through the filter of the Dutch school of communication, research was built on the foundations of the German tradition in communication – Marten Brouwer became aware of the role of informal communication in mass communication. Interpersonal communication in small social groups – a pre-existing (and invisible) network –, led to the expression of the theory regarding the mycelium model². The visible and exposed mass communication is attributed in the Brouwer model to the visible part of the mushroom, while the mycelium stands for the informal communication network, the invisible part. The Brouwer model is very useful in understanding new and emerging media. Through new technologies, the mycelium in the Brouwer model becomes visible. Therefore, all point to point or point to multipoint interactions in new and emerging media leave traces in a virtual space, confirming the functionality of the informal network, as an updated version of the same theories and functional models from Paul Lazarsfeld and Kurt Baschwitz (1938), for whom "The most important part of a newspaper is its readership" (according to Hemels, 2018).

The terrorist organizations make use of the new media by exploiting the informal communication networks stabilized (and recognizable) in the virtual environment. Therefore, the perspectives of researchers such as Baschwitz, Lazarsfeld or Brouwer currently permit viewing the mycelium, once the "photographic paper" or "filter paper" of the screen of each device

² The Brouwer model was proposed during his doctoral studies, but a year earlier, in a paper included in *Communication Concepts and Perspectives* coordinated by Lee O. Thayer: "[...] Marten Brouwer (1967, pp. 227-239) [...] associated mass communication with a mushroom, the visible part of it representing the media, and the mycelium being the complex network of interpersonal relationships within the groups. Under these conditions, media effects are interpersonal effects obtained in a slow crystallization process, achieved through the mass media. Most of these effects concern the way opinions are formed and refer to the study of the sociology of opinions, but some of them also refer to the cumulative effects on the value systems of society." (Lesenciuc, 2017, p. 171).

connected to the Internet by IP or IMS is used Terrorist organizations use new media by creating their own websites, with the aim of creating a broad framework for exposing terrorist messages (in different languages, depending on the intended target audiences and the action typologies envisaged) and video, audio, text materials or combined. Through new media they transmit training offer, recruitment opportunities, fundraising. They use the informal network at different levels of network exposure, including deep web and dark web, by distributing terminals (especially telephones) connected to personalized networks. Terrorist organizations have begun to function as networks of networks. From this perspective on things, the network of networks implies, on the one hand, the existence of visible communication flows in the case of traditional media (each of them migrating completely or partially to the network), but also highlighting invisible informal relationships through creating virtual networks. Therefore, the new media is only the way to highlight the existing mycelium-type infrastructure in the case of traditional media, which means that the functionality of models and theories applicable in the case of traditional media is not affected by informal networks highlighted by virtual connectivity. The major difference is that at the level of the "mycelium" in the case of new media, the relationships are mediated and configured by algorithms.

Under these circumstances, the question is whether the theories of media-terrorism relationship applicable to traditional media are also applicable to new media. In this regard, we will analyze the media communication of the terrorist organization Daesh.

NEW MEDIA AND TERRORISM. THE DAESH CASE

The most eloquent example of new media – terrorism relationship is that of the terrorist organization Daesh. This organization understood that both traditional and new media must be used, and hence it used informal networks stabilized in the virtual environment, at invisible levels of the Internet, inaccessible through traditional search engines, and requiring specific software, particular configurations or access permissions. It was the most important turning point in contemporary terrorism after the previous one, September 11, 2001. The difference is that the 9/11 radical change was visible worldwide and overexposed, while the current mutation is subtle, silent, producing effects in the most unexpected places. Daesh designed the

concept of the Caliphate in two ways. On the one hand it was declared as a territorial entity, Daesh conquering very large territories in the Middle East. On the other hand, the Caliphate was declared in the virtual field. The two hypostases of the expression of the terrorist organization, known as ISIS (Daesh) 1.0 vs ISIS (Daesh) 2.0, respectively, the Islamic Caliphate vs the virtual or digital Islamic Caliphate, led to repositioning in relation to the updated version. The control in the digital world is not so easy to be understood and then to be applied. In an excellent study dedicated to the relationship between new media and terrorism (focused on the Daesh organization), Lisa Wiechert (2017, p. 8) sees the problem from the same perspective:

“Winning a territorial war is not easy but it is possible. The hard part will be to win the war of ideas spread in a virtual world of the internet which is known to not forget. [...] The Islamic State is also a digital caliphate (Atwan, p. 19). A global network of individual willing to fight and die for an extremist ideology [...] The Islamic State is an intangible threat, which allows terrorist to radicalize children in their parents’ house, using a technology that was invented to connect people. A city like Mosul can be conquered by military force, but how does one conquer a digital caliphate?”

It is difficult to respond to such problem, as the knowledge of the terrorist organization is at a very low level. Wiechert (2017, p. 11), considers that it is completely missing: “[...] the Islamic State, similar to North Korea, is an information vacuum”). Once the whole set of terrorist actions was completely moved in networks, the principle of communicating vessels apparently becomes a euphemistic formula used in establishing the relationships between the media and the terrorist organization. The market where the demand and supply of symbolic goods meet is transformed into a market of terror, and the ways of influence used by terrorist organizations, such as propaganda, are understood from the perspective of terrorists as advertising, which are not interested in business purposes, but are constructed in relation to the radical, extremist beliefs of terrorists (Wiechert, 2017, p. 14). In this market, the slogan of Daesh, *baqiyya wa*

tatamaddad (remaining and expanding), once gaining the new connotation, allows a complete understanding of the perspective on expansion in physical and virtual space. This fact explains why, in the hierarchy of the terrorist organization, "The media executives of the Islamic State are more important than soldiers"; "Senior media operatives are ranked equally as military emirs and are part of the strategic leadership" (Miller and Mekhennet 2015, *apud* Wiechert, 2017, p. 29). The new type of organization is not only a terrorist one (or a classic terrorist organization, like Al Qaeda), but also one that offers products in a specific market. These products are viral and transform the organization into a social actor adapted to the new socio-communication trends.

Within the Daesh organization, the "media diwan (minister)" is responsible for the propaganda campaign through the new media (with a special role in the radicalization of the followers), without neglecting the production through the traditional mass media (television, radio, print media etc.) addressed to the general public (each of these traditional media having an equivalent in the network: website, streaming channels, social networks). This results from the analysis of the combined effects of the efforts of Daesh propaganda structures: al-Hayat Media, aimed at sending messages to the West and non-Arab audiences, al-Furqan, the old structure or the classic media department, initially sending messages to the Iraqi public, subsequently, to Arab audiences everywhere, al-Hisam, the department responsible for producing and transmitting complex messages through propaganda films, to which are added the structures of Al-Himma, Ajnad, Dabiq, Rumiya, Konstantiniyye. By institutionalizing the new media, associating the name of an institution with those of different virtual pages, the necessary level of trust was created. To ensure the functionality of this communication network set up by Daesh, the organization has prepared and distributed manuals that describe the logic of the actions. In a brief presentation of the strategy of terrorist propaganda transmitted through the media, Daesh was interested in constructing narratives that propose the alternative interpretive realities, countering counter-narratives and launching the so-called media "projectiles" (through which Daesh terrorists understand "anything that could anger the enemies of Allah", including, or primarily in reference to, terrorist acts transformed into "acts of communication", in accordance with the principle of Rodrigo Alsina):

"[...] in order to fight Daesh's IT supremacy, the international community must try to understand the logic and strategy behind its propaganda. To this end, we briefly analyzed a document that describes the logic behind the organization's propaganda, from the official perspective of the organization: the Daesh manual "Media Operative, you are a jihadi, too!". It can be seen from the title that the promotion of the organization is seen as another face of jihad, a way of fighting similar to what the fighters in the territory do. The authors of the manual provide accurate information on how the organization's media operations should be conducted as an integral part of jihad. [...] Daesh outlined its propaganda strategy around three main pillars that emerge from the analyzed document: the presentation of an alternative reality; counteracting the "intellectual invasion" led by international media channels; launching propaganda "projectiles" on the enemy." (Stoian-Karadeli, 2019:, pp. 68-69)

Although the Daesh terrorist network (in the current version, acting exclusively in the virtual space) is the first terrorist organization that chose for the use of the full spectrum of media possibilities, the new media play two distinct roles: they serve as a virtual mirror for the traditional media, respectively, as a structure for the extension and radicalization of terrorists, i.e. as a "mycelium" type structure, equivalent in the new media to "echo chambers" type structures. What is different in Daesh 2.0 action from other types of terrorist actions is precise targeting, without deviating from the classical principles, norms, models and theories of mass communication (Wiechert, 2017, p. 56):

"The Islamic State understands the concept of the marketing funnel. Starting with mass communications, over social media as well as mass media to attract the attention of the widest possible audience they then proceed to <highly targeted techniques to refine their messages and increase the pool of those who are sympathetic, supportive and potential willing participants.>" (Schields, 2016)

Therefore, new media are used in order to retain members of the public who are in a relationship of cognitive consonance. Therefore, even if between the media institutions and terrorist organizations new connections of information flow transfer are opened, the previously presented theories regarding the media-terrorism relations remain valid, and the control can be achieved by inducing cognitive dissonance in relation to the messages of the terrorist organization.

The inability of Daesh to extend the informal network beyond those that are predisposed to radicalization confirms an old theory of mass communication: the boomerang effect of J.O. Whittaker (1967, pp. 159-177), applicable to the theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957/1962) regarding the differences of opinion between the transmitter (Daesh terrorist organization) and the general public. These differences between the pre-existing point of view of the receivers on the issues in question (the legitimacy of the expansion of the Caliphate, the need to recruit fighters, the killing of Christians in the Middle East, the request for funding for these causes, etc.) and that of transmitter lead to a categorical rejection of the message. It happens despite the fact that in terms of the quality of media products and messages transmitted nothing can be blamed on specialists within the terrorist organization: "closer examination reveals that the visual materials are purposeful, well-financed, and carefully choreographed" (German, 2019, p. 130). There is, therefore, an educated moral limit, which, once broken, entails the "boomerang effect" and the implicit "cognitive dissonance", reduced by rejecting the message and the source (in Festinger's terms, by changing the perspective of the source on the message). Therefore, as long as the messages of the terrorist organization, whether transmitted even through the new media (especially through social media), are radical messages, they can only meet people with a predisposition to radicalization, despite the fact that a year after the declaration of the Caliphate establishment, it was estimated that "forty-five thousand active ISIS Twitter accounts were operating in 2015" (German, 2019, p. 130).

HOW CAN THE PRESSURE BE ADJUSTED? CRITICAL MEDIA CONSCIOUSNESS

One of the most appropriate solutions – based on the support of models and theories of mass communication, but also of concepts such as security culture and societal resilience – is to develop, through formal, non-formal and informal education, the media awareness or *critical media consciousness*, a concept proposed by Todd Fraley and Elli Lester Roushanzamir (2006, p. 125):

“Critical media consciousness re-theorizes media literacy by expanding the critique to media production and regulation, opening up possible alternative forms of organization, and offering a re-conceptualization of the audience. Critical media consciousness suggests possibilities for more democratic approaches to producing media content, including alternative ways of gathering information, different organizational arrangements, and so forth.”

For a balanced approach to the messages of the terrorist organizations, it is necessary to cultivate a critical attitude, meant to lead to cognitive dissonance in relation to a series of ideological messages.

Once implemented, the concept of *critical media consciousness* offers the possibility to prevent the ways of transmitting messages from terrorist organizations, but especially to prevent further recruitment and radicalization. As stated by those who designed the concept, it cannot function and it produces effects at the individual level, without other necessary measures for regulating the pressure in the hydrodynamic system of the media - terrorism. Under the current conditions, in which the process of digitalization and digital literacy has been accelerated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the education necessary to reach the stage of critical media awareness is made much easier. It is important that this consciousness to be the result of public policies that implicitly intend to achieve a minimum level of security culture and societal resilience. Therefore, the depressurization system that prevents the functioning of the media-terrorism system as a system of communicating vessels in hydrodynamic balance involves a valve system to achieve this goal:

security culture → societal resilience → critical media awareness, acted through education.

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THE PRINCIPLE OF COMMUNICATING VESSELS. TERRORISM AS A FORM OF COMMUNICATION AND ITS HYDRODYNAMIC BALANCE WITH MEDIA

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COUNTERING AND PREVENTING RADICALISATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM: HOW TO EVALUATE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ONLINE COUNTER-MESSAGING

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ABSTRACT: The present paper sets out findings from a project focused on the effectiveness of the online Alternative (AN) and the Counter Narrative (CN) within the Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) efforts.³ What are the main factors for an effective online counter-messaging campaign against radicalisation and violent extremism? Is it possible to measure the effectiveness of such online campaigns?

The new guiding model proposed (the *GAMMA model revisited*) clearly shows the *realistic* objectives that an online campaign can set, so as to effectively contribute to the fight against violent extremism: 1. Raising awareness among the target audience (Awareness); 2. Encouraging online interaction and action (Engagement); 3. Promote the connection between online and offline actions (Impact). According to each objective, each campaign must choose and modulate the key elements that compose a communication campaign (Audience, Message, Messenger and Media) taking into account the close interrelation between socio-technical systems and narratives in order to ensure a significant level of *credibility* and *reliability*.

Keywords: counter-narratives; violent extremism; social media; online campaigns; radicalisation

INTRODUCTION

³ TRIVALENT “Terrorism Preventive via Radicalization Counter-Narrative”, project funded by the European Union under the “Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme”, grant agreement N. 740934 (<https://trivalent-project.eu/>).

In the radicalization process an important role is played by narratives, given their ability to offer a socially constructed version of reality that responds instrumentally to the propaganda goals of the narrator. Building on this finding, the focus of researchers and counter-terrorism practitioners in recent years has been on the potential of counter-narratives in combating and preventing radicalization (Cherney, 2018; Cherney & Belton, 2019; Braddock, 2020).

In response to the sophisticated communication skills shown by the IS terrorist group in online activities of recruitment and dissemination of digital contents, policymakers are paying increasing attention to the necessity to develop and augment online counter-messaging tools. Online campaigns and initiatives have thus proliferated in recent years, and these efforts can be divided into three categories based on the actors involved and the content disseminated (Briggs and Feve, 2013):

- 1) Counter-messaging (CN), aimed at deconstructing and discrediting violent extremist messages;
- 2) Alternative-messaging (AN), focused on the promotion of alternative narratives, positive values such as solidarity, and so on.
- 3) Government Strategic communications.

However, the question, as yet unanswered, is: how effective are these measures in preventing and combating radicalization and violent extremism? Evaluative research and analysis on Counter- and Alternative Narratives is limited and insufficient, both because this is a new field of study and because of the very nature of these initiatives. Indeed, if we consider that the objective of these efforts is to prevent and dissuade individuals from engaging in certain actions, any assessment method would need to measure a non-effect: non-radicalization. It is likewise difficult to assess the impact of counter-messaging with regard to the de-radicalization process, as this is a complex process entailing a large number of variables.

This paper aims to introduce a guiding model for a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of online alternative and counter-narratives. To this end, we formulated two research questions:

RQ1: What are the main factors that make online counter-messaging campaigns against radicalisation and violent extremism effective?

RQ2: Is it possible to measure the effectiveness of such online campaigns?

To address these research questions, we have carried out the following steps:

1. Critical analysis of recent studies evaluating the effectiveness of online counter- and alternative narrative campaigns conducted as part of Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) efforts;
2. Identification and presentation of some analytical models that may be useful in identifying the host of factors that play an important role in an online counter-messaging initiative;
3. Development of a guiding model for the implementation and evaluation of such campaigns.

EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ONLINE AN AND CN CAMPAIGNS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE RECENT STUDIES

Recent studies have shown little evidence of the effectiveness of counter-narratives in reducing the risk of violent radicalization (Horgan and Braddock, 2010; Carthy et al., 2020). The paucity of high-quality studies measuring these outcomes means that the evaluation cannot yet be considered conclusive and further research is needed.

Our focus in the present study is specifically on online counter-narrative with the goal of taking a state-of-the-art look at a still virgin and unexplored area of study.

For this first objective, recent studies focusing mainly on the analysis of the effectiveness of online campaigns to counter violent radicalization have been selected and critically analysed, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses. The limited studies on this topic include both manuals and reports that illustrate and guide the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of CN (counter-narrative) and AN (alternative narrative) campaigns and theoretical analysis and empirical research to measure the impact of such campaigns.

In 2013, an early work by Reynolds and Tuck (2013) sought to offer guidance for monitoring and evaluating (M&E) a counter-narrative campaign. The core of a CN campaign M&E lies in an analysis of the metrics from the websites and social platforms used. Social media metrics fall into two categories: *awareness* and *engagement*. The first refers to the total number of people who view the campaign contents (whether videos, ads, posts, websites or other digital material) and some information about

those people; the second is defined as the volume and types of interaction between audience members, campaigners or campaign materials. Engagement can include everything from “likes” and “shares” to email responses and can be either positive or negative. Knowing the number and nature of instances of engagement can help campaigners understand their audience’s reactions to the campaign or its content. These metrics, which can be combined and analysed to form a comprehensive picture of a counter-narrative campaign’s performance, help campaigners to understand the *impact* they are having. Obviously, there is only so much that can be understood about the impact of such campaigns: analysing metrics can certainly offer insights into online impact, but it is very difficult to measure abstract attitudinal or behavioural outcomes. However, the M&E process can be improved and enriched by employing additional quantitative and qualitative research methods such as focus groups, in-depth interviews, online survey, geo-location analysis and sentiment analysis. Qualitative approaches in particular can provide a deeper understanding of how the public reacts to and perceives these campaigns.

More recently, empirical studies have been conducted on counter-narrative campaigns designed to prevent and fight terrorism on social media (Langer et al., 2019; Silverman et al., 2016; Speckhard, Shajkovci and Bodo, 2018; Speckhard et al., 2018). In particular, Langer’s study of online campaigns showed which characteristics of social media posts produced the greatest reaction among the target group. 1. *Success*: posts in the form of reactions connected to a feeling of success; 2. *Determent*: personal fates such as stories of family members of the victims, former extremists etc. are popular. Indeed, the effectiveness of these campaigns’ narratives depends a great deal on the ability to provoke strong emotions. In terms of audience information, research shows the importance of *Self-promotion*, an integrated call to action that offers interested people the opportunity to play an active role, while audiences respond less to hints and advice (*Suggestions*). Another important aspect for capturing attention and provoking greater reaction in all of these fields is visualization, i.e. the use of video and photographic material. In addressing the potential to improve the impact on social media, the analysis sets out from the observation that these types of campaigns quite often have a low level of popularity. And finally, studies suggest that these initiatives must be integrated into other counterterrorism efforts, both by employing other effective ICTs

(Information and Communication Technologies) and by intensifying real-world activities, especially interaction with potential target groups.

The serious limitations of this study lie in the fact that a large amount of data had to be excluded from further analysis due to the low rate of reaction on the part of the public. As most counter-narrative campaigns address a very specific target group and do not achieve high rates of response to their posts, however, it might be useful to examine and contrast the characteristics of messages with low response rates by applying a quantitative approach to a larger and more representative data sample.

Another research assessing the impact of online campaigns (Silverman et al., 2016) presents the development, deployment and evaluation of three counter-narrative campaigns. Its initial research hypothesis is that even with limited funding and a guide to support NGOs in launching counter-narrative projects on social media, appreciable results can be achieved in terms of *awareness*, *engagement* and *impact*. The analysis of social media metrics confirms high levels of *awareness* (the total number of people who view the campaign content) and *engagement* (volume and types of interaction). In particular, a qualitative analysis of the comments suggests that these campaigns display a capacity to promote critical reflection and the consideration of different points of view (“sustained engagements”). These campaigns also demonstrate that people undergoing processes of personal de-radicalization displayed a desire to contact the campaign-promoting organization to ask for assistance (*impact*). As for measuring the *impact* of counter-narratives, the authors themselves admit that assessment does not extend beyond impressions and engagement metrics. One positive outcome is undoubtedly the fact that it succeeded in producing reactions, even negative ones, through comments, sustained engagement and conversations. The activation and promotion of online conversations continues to represent a useful tool that can potentially foster critical thinking through exposure to alternative views.

The International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism (ICSVE) has also conducted two highly interesting exploratory studies on efforts to combat ISIS ideology and its online dissemination. The first (Speckhard, Shajkovci and Bodo, 2018) presents the results of exploratory research on the effects of exposure to counter-narrative material on social media among ISIS group followers, promoters, and sympathizers. The research not only explores the degree of radicalization and online behaviour of these

individuals, but also examines the effects of posting counter-videos to their online pages, i.e. whether the proposed counter-narrative leads to any change in their observable behaviour. The research results indicate how this particular target (the same digital audience also addressed by terrorist groups) can be reached and demonstrate that people displaying radicalized online behaviour (through Facebook accounts) can easily be found and communicated with, spearing counter-narrative materials. Obviously, little or nothing can be said about the long-term effects, in part because most of the individuals addressed in this study deleted the posted material and severed communication (by “unfriending” the sender or disabling their accounts). The best counter-narratives are those created by disillusioned insiders and not labelled as counter-narratives because these features grant them a better chance of reaching individuals who are already consuming terrorist materials. Moreover, the authors assert that this investigation, however exploratory, is nonetheless a useful starting point for future research, mainly based on the hypothesis that the dissemination of the true stories of ISIS deserters could produce effects among radicalized individuals.

The second ICSVE study (Speckhard et al., 2018) focuses on countering ISIS ideology and its active recruitment in digital spaces by utilizing the same methods employed by the terrorist group. In this case, another exploratory research aims to identify the most suitable method for countering ISIS ideology on Facebook and ascertain if the counter-narratives used in these efforts might have an observable and measurable positive impact. This exploratory study is important because it is one of the first online focus-groups of radicalized individuals conducted to test the exposure effects of CN materials and because it presents two significant results: it shows how this type of target audience can be reached and what kind of material (in particular, video clips of ISIS defectors) is most effective for engaging this audience and their followers. Moreover, this study does not take into consideration the limit of not being able to evaluate long-term effects.

Another interesting study focuses on the effectiveness of counter-narratives by demonstrating the potential of combining online and offline tools. The study (Speckhard, Shajkovci and Ahmed, 2019) presents the results of a research project aimed at measuring attitudes towards extremist groups and the appeal of violent extremist ideologies such as ISIS among

“vulnerable” Somali communities in the United States. It also makes a methodological argument for counter-narratives as an effective Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) tool. The focus group involved showing videos and visual materials with counter-narrative content to encourage discussion around issues of ISIS recruitment and ISIS-related radicalization. The authors point out some successful elements in the research: participation was active and satisfactory, and participants expressed gratitude for having been given the opportunity to express themselves in an environment they perceived as safe, given the particular sensitivity of the topics in question. Moreover, through dialogue and face-to-face interaction, the participants changed their positions and developed more solidly negative opinions about ISIS. According to the authors, this positive outcome depended in large part on the use of videos with emotionally evocative content and the conversational character of the experiment itself. Unfortunately, the research cannot be said to have influenced with certainty a group of individuals “at risk” of radicalization. Despite its limitations, however, CN remains one of the main available tools for countering the appeal of violent extremism. The online dissemination of this type of material plays an important role in successfully reaching those who respond to such stimuli (in the exact same approach characterizing ISIS activity) with the aim of involving them further in online or offline discussions.

Finally, van Eerten and Doosje (2020) have carried out a significant examination of social media counter-messaging as a potential means of preventing or countering radicalization in violent extremism. The study predominantly focuses on Salafi-Jihadi extremism countering efforts and examines the relative feasibility of preventing or countering radicalization and violent extremism via counter-messaging efforts. Given that radicalization is a very complex process involving many variables including possible exposure to online material, it follows that the task of assessing the effectiveness of counter-messaging in the framework of counter-narrative and prevention initiatives is likewise extremely complicated. Moreover, the greatest difficulty in this latter case lies in the very nature of the initiative: trying to measure a non-effect, i.e. the absence of radicalization. Along the same lines, however, the authors suggest the opposite assertion, that counter-messaging is ineffective, cannot be sustained either. They argue that counter-messaging has the potential to

succeed only if it addresses people who show interest in and sympathy for extremist groups but are not yet involved in them, or possibly also already-radicalized individuals who show signs of doubt and reconsideration.

The study thus proposes several key principles for developing a social media counter-messaging campaign, beginning from the assumption that such a campaign is exclusively preventive in nature (although potentially including individuals who show signs of disengagement with the targeted campaigns). The study displays some limitations: the topic of narratives is addressed in various disciplines, making it difficult to collect all the significant literature; it is a highly dynamic field characterized by constantly and rapidly updated data and results; there is a great deal of “grey literature” (not purely scientific) and limited resources for selecting experts and conducting interviews and focus groups with them; and, given the prevalence of literature focused on countering Jihadist propaganda, the results cannot be generalized to other extremist groups.

Considering the insights derived from our selected literature review, some strengths and weaknesses can be identified:

- the development and implementation of online CN and AN is still in its infancy, so the results of the research presented here must be treated with great caution. It is clear that the domain of counter-messaging is severely hampered by a lack of strong empirical research and thorough evaluation. These limitations are due in part to the difficulty of securing radicalized individuals as research participants. Although the two exploratory studies carried out by the *International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism* (ICSVE) scholarly team (Speckhard *et al.*, 2018; Speckhard, Shajkovci and Bodo, 2018) demonstrate an ability to intercept radicalized online individuals, they also clearly show the difficulties in successfully involving them as active participants. As we have seen, the various theories analysed by van Eerten and Doosje (2020) clearly show that counter-messaging is a wholly ineffective tool in the de-radicalization process;

- CN and AN campaigns have proven useful as preventive tools. While it is clearly difficult to intervene in the thought or behaviour of radicalized individuals, there seems to be some promising room for manoeuvre in relation to the population of extremist group “fans” and sympathizers. In the case of Jihadist propaganda, these “Jihobbysts” (Brachman, 2009) are not directly affiliated with the groups in question but

they consider themselves part of the movement and are active in disseminating materials online. Some of the studies presented here clearly show that these campaigns can offer alternative points of view, provoking doubt and encouraging the development of critical thinking. The evaluation of some CN and AN campaigns launched on social media (Silverman *et al.*, 2016), as we have seen, not only found high levels of *awareness* (the total number of people who view the campaign content) and *engagement* (volume and types of interaction), but also indicated that it is possible to foster critical reflection and the consideration of different points of view (“sustained engagements”). More interestingly, these campaigns also demonstrated that people undergoing a process of personal de-radicalization can be reached;

- **the effectiveness of these tools in changing attitudes and behaviours remains difficult to assess.** In general, it is extremely difficult to measure changes in attitudes and beliefs because such changes comprise a long-term process. It is even more challenging to measure and evaluate this aspect in the field of prevention in particular since the desired result (prevention, non-radicalization) is a non-event. The anonymity characterising the internet makes this task even more difficult: it is not easy to determine precisely who is involved (or not) in a social media campaign. As van Eerten, J.J. and Doosje conclude in their study, it is virtually impossible to establish a direct connection between counter-messaging campaigns and the prevention of extremism (van Eerten and Doosje, 2020);

- **the need for further testing and online and offline research.** Much of the research presented here is focused on assessing the impact of online CN and AN campaigns and all admit to having limitations due to the very nature of the tools used. The main difficulty remains that of measuring changes in attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. In particular, scholars assert the importance of developing specific offline tools where such campaigns show a proven potential to intercept individuals who display some doubt about their chosen extremist group (Silverman *et al.*, 2016). As a case in point, the research carried out among Somali people in California, a community considered “vulnerable” to the influence of Jihadist propaganda, demonstrates the effectiveness of the focus group technique and face-to-face interaction in creating a comfortable and emotionally engaging environment among participants and, thanks in part to the presence of a moderator, stimulating intense conversation and the

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exchange of different points of view (Speckhard, Shajkovci & Ahmed, 2019);

- **research confirms the usefulness of both quantitative and qualitative research tools in evaluating the effectiveness of campaigns.** Finally, all the studies analysed here suggest that quantitative and qualitative research tools should be developed and integrated. “The counter-narrative monitoring & evaluation handbook” clearly explains and details all the research tools that can effectively contribute to the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) process (Reynolds & Tuck, 2016). Analysing the metrics can certainly offer insight into the online impact of CN and AN campaigns, but additional quantitative and qualitative research methods – such as focus groups, in-depth interviews, online surveys, geo-location analysis and sentiment analysis – are very important for enriching the evaluation itself. Obviously, each research tool has its pros and cons and must be selected and used according to the objectives of the research. For example, an online survey offers rapid results but cannot always reach the intended audience, due in part to self-selection bias. Faced with the evident challenge of evaluating the effects of counter-messaging tools, one thing is clear: each research method can help to improve our knowledge.

ONLINE COUNTER-MESSAGING AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EFFECTIVENESS AND CREDIBILITY

The critical analysis of the selected literature has clearly shown the difficulty and scarcity of research and models capable of measuring the effectiveness of the counter- and alternative narrative efforts carried out to date in tackling violent extremism. Before asking if the effectiveness of such online campaigns can be measured, however, it is appropriate to appraise the main factors for an effective online counter-messaging campaign against radicalization and violent extremism.

Many studies clearly agree in showing that the role of credibility and trust in the entire online communication process must be analysed in more depth. Currently, this aspect represents the real challenge in potentially developing more effective strategies.

A recent study by Braddock and Morrison (2018) focuses on the link between credibility and effectiveness in online counter-narratives against

terrorism, showing that the transformative power of such messages depends not only on their content but also on how the target audience perceives the source. The study analyses and highlights the failure of some counter-narrative programs due to a perceived lack of source credibility and reliability on the part of the selected target.⁴ The messages in these programs may be extremely accurate, but the audience's lack of confidence gives rise to a rejection response, thus nullifying any persuasive effect.

The authors thus develop useful guidelines for constructing credible and effective communication strategies, beginning from and linking two interesting models: the "Arc of Terrorism" model developed by Horgan (2014) and the "MAIN" model proposed by Sundar (2008). Horgan's "arc of terrorism" focuses on people's involvement in and disengagement from terrorism, demonstrating that terrorists cultivate confidence in their propaganda to improve effectiveness and that such confidence in the content sources is fundamental for disengagement as well. Sundar's MAIN model addresses the credibility of online sources by identifying the specific content in and structural characteristics of online messages that affect the degree of credibility users attribute to message sources. In exploring the credibility of the internet, this study identifies 4 specific factors (modality, agency, interactivity and navigability) that can have significant psychological effects on online message users. That is, these four structural aspects of internet-based communication technologies can be very useful for understanding the online contexts of terrorist communication and counter-narrative campaigns in that they may influence users' perceptions of source credibility.

According to Sundar, therefore, psychological and behavioural effects vary depending on how these structural aspects occur in the medium itself. In particular, the affordances of "modality" and "agency" are relevant for the content of counter- and alternative narratives, while the aspects of "interactivity" and "navigability" refer to the way CN and AN are integrated into online interfaces.

⁴ For instance, the case of the initiative "Think Again Turn Away", a counter-narrative social media program of the US State Department's Center for Strategic Counter-terrorism Communication established in late 2013 and operating as a Twitter account (https://twitter.com/ThinkAgain_DOS, 12/10/2020) that posted counter-messaging content aimed at ISIS. This program did not appear to achieve any clear results and it was criticized for its poor production quality in comparison to ISIS propaganda products as well as for its counterproductive effects.

Credibility and trust are thus fundamental variables in the communication process and can only be achieved by taking into account the close interrelation between socio-technical systems and narratives. This consideration is also at the core of the new narrative ecosystem paradigm developed by a Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore research group (Lombardi, Lucini and Maiolino, 2020) as part of a pilot study launched under the framework of the TRIVALENT (*Terrorism Preventive via Radicalization Counter-Narrative*) project⁵ and involving 300 students enrolled in a B.A. course. Specifically, a format model was developed as part of the innovative paradigm of the narrative ecosystem that may be useful in understanding the communication processes that influence both processes of radicalization and extremist communication and proactive, adaptive programmes of combatting and prevention.

The format is composed of two fundamental elements:

- 1) the communication ecosystem;
- 2) the narrative-scope.

The first refers to the context in which narratives operate, interacting with complex and interconnected, mutually influencing socio-technical systems. Moreover, the authors argue, the social context in which people live is characterized by a specific form of vulnerability. The last important element they identify is the “pulverisation” of the audience, thus suggesting it is necessary to focus on micro-targeting practices and selected audience groups. As detailed below in the analysis of the selected campaigns developed in the pilot study, therefore, violence is conceptualized as multidimensional and dependent on personal, social and contextual variables. In particular, *emotions*, *feelings* and *affects* play a fundamental role in defining the characteristics of the target audience and the communication ecosystem. According to the F.E.A.R. model developed by this same research group, feelings (personal), emotions (social) and affects (pre-personal) are key in analysing violent behaviours.

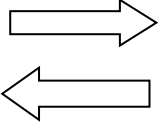
Table 1. The F.E.A.R. model to fight FEAR

⁵ TRIVALENT “Terrorism Preventive via Radicalization Counter-Narrative”, project funded by the European Union under the “Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme”, grant agreement N. 740934 (<https://trivalent-project.eu/>).

F. Feelings	E. Emotions	A. Affects	R. response
<p><i>personal</i></p> <p>A feeling is a sensation that has been checked against previous experiences and labelled. It is personal and biographical because every person has a distinct set of previous sensations from which to draw when interpreting their feelings.</p>	<p><i>social</i></p> <p>Emotions are complex. According to some theories, they are states of feeling that result in physical and psychological changes that influence our behavior. An emotion is the projection display of a feeling. Unlike feelings, the display of emotion can be genuine or feigned.</p>	<p><i>prepersonal</i></p> <p>Affective processes include all feelings and responses, positive or negative, related to emotion-laden behavior, knowledge, or beliefs. Affect can alter perceptions of situations as well as outcomes of cognitive effort; it can also fuel, block, or terminate cognition and behavior. An affect is a non-conscious experience of intensity.</p>	<p>?</p>

The format model corresponds to the “R” of F.E.A.R. and has two fundamental characteristics: it is context-sensitive and target-oriented. This model is useful for guiding the communication processes that influence both the processes of radicalization and extremist communication, and the actions of contrast and prevention. The format model is thus composed of two interrelated components to be adapted to different audiences, scenarios and socio-technical systems, graphically summarized as follows:

Table 2. *Format model*

Target-oriented		Context-sensitive
<p>Emotions, feelings, affects of the individual part of the audience</p>		<p>Sensitive nature of the communication ecosystem that shapes the narratives and influences them according to the emotional part of each personality.</p>

THE 'REVISITED GAMMA MODEL': GUIDING AND ASSESSING ONLINE COUNTER-MESSAGING

On the basis of our review of existing literature on the subject and the results of the pilot study carried out as part of the *Trivalent* project, we present our evaluation and measurement proposal broken down by key elements along the lines of the GAMMA+ model formulated by the European Commission's *Radicalisation Awareness Network* (RAN):⁶ Goal, Audience, Message, Messenger, Media, and Action, plus Monitoring and Evaluation (RAN 2017, 2019). This revisited model is proposed as a guideline for developing and implementing, monitoring and evaluating an effective alternative and counter-narrative campaign. For each element we briefly outline our proposal for how to guide and assess the effectiveness of an online campaign.

Goal. According to RAN guidelines, effective communication campaigns must have clear, realistic and measurable objectives. Unfortunately, all the studies and research carried out so far on the effectiveness of CNs and ANs have clearly displayed serious limitations as to the possibility of measuring the effectiveness of such campaigns, in particular online campaigns, in any way other than partially. In reality such campaigns can realistically achieve some objectives, such as that of measuring levels of awareness and engagement through social media metrics, but they can hardly measure impact understood as the ability to modify the minds and behaviours of the individuals involved. As demonstrated by some pilot studies we have analysed, measurements of this kind might become more feasible by shifting the focus from online to offline actions. Given the development of technology, online initiatives have enormous potential in terms of awareness-raising and intercepting target groups; beginning by involving a small target group, offline initiatives can instead make use of a series of qualitative survey techniques

⁶ The Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN) is a network supported and funded by the European Commission (https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network_en, 12/10/2020). Its purpose is to network practitioners from around Europe working on the prevention of radicalization.

designed to assess and measure possible changes in individuals' attitudes and behaviours.

Therefore, our analysis suggests that an online campaign may set itself three main realistic and achievable objectives:

1. Raising awareness among the target audience
2. Encouraging online interaction and action
3. Promoting the connection between online and offline actions

As we will see, to achieve these objectives the common thread linking all the key elements of a campaign against violent extremism is confidence and credibility. To be effective, a communication campaign must be perceived as credible and reliable in terms of both its content and the media it employs.

Audience. All CN and AN implementation guidelines agree on the importance of identifying a target audience to ensure the effectiveness of the campaign. As we have seen, a communicative context characterized by greater audience heterogeneity and “pulverisation” is more vulnerable to misinformation and is also more difficult to control. Therefore, it is useful to identify communities, groups, and specific categories to which our message is addressed, i.e. focusing on microtargeting practices and segments of selected audience groups. As demonstrated by the pilot study, the concept of violence is multidimensional and directly dependent on multiple variables, personal, social and contextual, that must be taken into account when designing an online communication campaign.

The studies agree in recognizing that young people are an especially relevant category by virtue of their vulnerability to the phenomenon of violent extremism. In addition, the younger generation has deep familiarity with technology and can more easily be reached and involved in online communication campaigns. On the other hand, however, they are a particularly vulnerable segment of the population due to their as-yet-immature cognitive abilities and, therefore, more subject to the risks inherent in using new technologies (see *Media*). As we will see below, this last aspect is very important when the campaign is based on peer-to-peer communication (see *Messenger*).

Message. As many studies have shown, the main alternative and counter-narrative strategies employed to date have a number of limitations and problematic aspects. Counter-messaging, aimed at deconstructing and discrediting violent extremist messages, has displayed a series of

boomerang effects: first, the risk of further polarizing the social context and augmenting the strength and appeal of extremist messages. Due to its oppositional nature, this approach may potentially repeat and reinforce the very messages it seeks to counteract, and there is no question it has been found completely ineffective on individuals who are already radicalized (van Eerten and Doosje, 2020). Alternative-messaging, focused instead on promoting narratives featuring positive values such as solidarity and so on, has limited effectiveness in fostering audience involvement. This limit stems from the fact that negative messages tend to resonate more than positive ones in online communication. Finally, government strategic communication suffers from a considerable lack of confidence and credibility due to the very nature of the source, as governments may be perceived as distant from the target audience and not impartial.

As illustrated by the new narrative ecosystem paradigm and Format Model, communications aimed at conditioning people's actions to combat and prevent extremism must take into account the personal, social and contextual variables that characterize the target audience and specific type of communication ecosystem. An effective alternative communication strategy would thus go beyond predefined categories such as today's CNs, ANs and government strategic communication, but it should be calibrated to the sensitivities and needs of the target audience.

What all the studies examined show and the F.E.A.R. model and proposed Format model confirm is that content and messages with a strong emotional impact have enormous potential. Extremist narratives themselves clearly illustrate that emotional logic is hugely effective because it responds to certain basic human needs (a demand for meaning, adventure, perceived deprivation, and camaraderie, to name just a few). Therefore, persuasion is facilitated by the immersion that can be achieved using vivid language, visual materials and the involvement of individuals and personalities similar to the target audience.

Messenger. As noted when analysing the previous elements, it is important that actors who can transmit confidence and credibility to the target audience be used as campaign sources. In particular, we have seen that individuals perceive a similar audience, and therefore similar sources, as more credible. Young people are the target audience of most of the counter-messaging efforts; it follows that peer-to-peer communication can have considerable potential, but also entail considerable risk given this

category's vulnerability due to their age and more limited ability to consciously manage the potential dangers inherent in using new technologies. Moreover, the experience and authority transmitted by the source play an important role. In the case of alternative and counter-narratives, messages from leaders, former terrorist group members, respected personalities from inside the online community, so-called 'influencers', etc., could exercise greater dissuasive power.

An important distinction can be made between formal and informal counter-messaging in terms of sources and credibility. Communication campaigns against violent extremism suffer a significant decrease in public confidence especially when they are launched or sponsored by governments. Such narratives risk being equated with propaganda and rendering attempts to counter extremist ideologies counter-productive. Civil society suffers less from this lack of credibility, although the campaigns of large organisations are often perceived as lacking in objectivity and reliability because they are aligned with or financially supported by governments. One field that has received less attention, however, is informal counter-messaging (Lee, 2019), that is, the array of initiatives in this domain carried out by individual citizens without any connection to governments or larger organisations. This is a vast, informal sector of actors producing digital content that is critical of extremist messages. Much of this informal material is disseminated on social media, and it is very successful. Informal actors are perceived as "free", authentic and, therefore, more in line with their audiences. Moreover, studies on online persuasive communication also show that perceived confidence (among other aspects) is reinforced if the source is presented through dynamism, likeability and goodwill (Wathen & Burkell, 2002). Informal counter-messaging is often based on parodies and imitations that become "viral", reaching a very wide audience and, often unintentionally, creating a "natural" counterweight to the spread of extremist messages. Informal counter-messaging also involves limits and risks, but its power has yet to be explored and analysed through further research, especially in view of possible synergy and collaboration with counter-messaging organizations.

Media. A wide range of media can be employed to convey narratives against violent extremism. Our analysis focuses on online communication and identifies social media as the most effective tool thanks to certain of its specific traits: diffusion, versatility and, above all, interactivity. The latter

aspect is fundamental if we consider the importance of interacting with and fostering emotional involvement among the public 2.0 platforms such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram that facilitate person-to-person interaction, promote perceptions of authority and reliability among users and can thus enhance the credibility of the campaign itself. In addition, however, it is important to acknowledge the risks inherent in new technologies, such as the 'algorithmic dimension'. Social media algorithms are based on a selection mechanism that tends to offer personalized content, thus constantly exposing individuals with certain opinions to content in line with their beliefs. In so doing, they limit the spectrum of different opinions, fostering polarization and prejudice. This process of "personalization" is even truer for platforms such as YouTube that are widely used by extremist actors, young people, and CN/AN campaign designers. According to the selective exposure paradigm, therefore, automatic algorithms offer users videos and information that match their interests and orientations, but it is also necessary to consider that the online content being suggested depends not only on individual selection but also the use of keywords. A study on YouTube's role in counter-messaging (Schmitt et al., 2018) clearly shows that inserting common keywords such as 'ISIS' generates results including both extremist content and counter-messaging. The fundamental issue raised by the research is that the counter-messaging material on the web is clearly inferior to extremist propaganda, creating a marked imbalance. Paradoxically, then, there is a risk that counter-messaging campaigns might expose users to counter-productive messages and content, thus increasing the chances of promoting extremist ideas. The key point to consider is thus being aware of these dynamics, knowing how social media work and, obviously, developing a critical understanding of the manipulative capabilities of the messages to which the user is exposed.

Action. The last element of a counter-messaging initiative is action, understood as the expected response on the part of users. In the case of an online campaign, actions can be divided by level of involvement and range from a minimum level of involvement to outright action. Campaigns can thus focus exclusively on raising general awareness, set objectives such as obtaining likes and shares for their contents, or aim at active involvement through more in-depth interactions and online discussions, organised encounters and the connection with offline actions and initiatives. An important objective, therefore, is to foster proactive involvement that

stimulates users (but also the producers and consumers of online campaigns) to become involved.

Monitoring and Evaluation. Naturally, the “Monitoring & Evaluation” phase anticipates, accompanies and concludes each communication campaign. Effectiveness evaluation and measurement obviously depends on the specific objectives the producer has set, thus bringing to a close the circle of the GAMMA model.

Our analysis clearly shows that realistic objectives for an online counter-messaging campaign would be to raise awareness and encourage action, both online and offline. The effectiveness of these initiatives can be measured in part through social media metrics that aid in estimating the level of awareness and involvement, but nothing can really tell us about changes in target audience attitudes and behaviours. The challenge is to design a campaign aiming to be as *credible* and *effective* as possible thanks to the key elements highlighted by the analysis of research and studies conducted so far.

Table 3. The “revisited GAMMA model”

Key elements	Highlights
GOAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising awareness among the target audience • Encouraging online interaction and action • Promoting the connection between online and offline actions
AUDIENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Pulverisation” of the audience, more vulnerable to misinformation • Micro-targeting practices and segments of selected audiences group • Young people
MESSAGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content calibrated to the sensitivities and needs of the target audience • Emotional logic
MESSENGER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The source must transmit confidence and credibility • Potential of informal counter-messaging
MEDIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media • Awareness about the algorithmic dimension
ACTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Range of involvement: from raising general awareness to active involvement online and offline

CONCLUSIONS

All of the studies and research on online CN and AN analysed here identify a number of limitations on the prospects of measuring abstract attitudinal or behavioural impacts. At the same time, they also recognize the enormous potential of these tools in terms of preventive action.

If well-designed, awareness-raising campaigns against radicalization and violent extremism can offer alternative point of views, instilling doubt and encouraging the development of critical thinking.

Social media metrics are a useful instrument for quantitatively measuring the effectiveness of an online campaign in terms of *awareness* and *engagement*, but they rarely allow us to assess *impact* in terms of changing beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. The latter type of evaluation can only be achieved through qualitative analysis methods such as focus groups, in-depth interviews etc., and the development of specific offline tools. The table below summarises the types of tools useful for measuring effectiveness according to the objective pursued:

Table 4. Tools for measuring the effectiveness of an online campaign

GOALS	ACTIONS	TOOLS
<i>Awareness</i> Number of individuals who have been reached	Impressions, reach and views	Social media and website analytics services
<i>Engagement</i> Number of individual interactions	Likes, comments, shares and retweets/reposts	Social media and website analytics services
<i>Impact</i> Connection to online and offline actions	Comments, interactions, discussions and	Quantitative and qualitative data analysis: geo-location analysis; sentiment analysis, online surveys, in-depth interviews and focus groups

The “revised GAMMA model” clearly indicates the realistic objectives that an online campaign can set for itself so as to effectively contribute to the fight against violent extremism:

1. Raising awareness among the target audience (*Awareness*)
2. Encouraging online interaction and action (*Engagement*)

3. Promoting the connection between online and offline actions (Impact)

In relation to these objectives, each campaign must choose and modulate the key elements comprising a communication campaign (Audience, Message, Messenger and Media) in such a way as to ensure significant levels of credibility and reliability. These latter objectives, as we have seen, can only be pursued by taking into account the two interrelated elements composing the Format Model: the communication ecosystem and the narrative scope.

In conclusion, the real challenge in countering the negative effects of extremist messages lies in combining and connecting online and offline CVE efforts. It is necessary to strengthen people's social cognitive resilience to violent extremism by fostering a greater critical understanding of the manipulative nature of messages and a greater awareness not only of the role of the internet and its channels, but also of how it functions.

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FROM TRADITIONAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION TO NBIC⁷ WEAPON

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ABSTRACT: The "Communication and conflict resolution" topic has been multidisciplinary approached from different angles, throughout the Societal Evolution. Conflict resolution and mitigation process requires, in addition to the understanding of mechanisms and its knowledge characteristics, an optimal and accelerated adaptation of National and International Policies, strategies and conflict management tools. The aim of this essay is to focus on the particularities of communication in crisis / conflict situations, specific to multinational military missions in the context of accelerated technological evolution.

Keywords: communication, crises, conflict management, military coalition, interoperability, NBIC weapon

*"Winning without fighting"
Sun Tzu*

INTRODUCTION

The article presents, in a synthetic form, results of the research on the subject, conducted in the multinational military environment at peace and in military operations. The first part provides an overview of what it means to communicate and manage conflicts during the last two decades, in the military environment. The second part focuses on the results of the analysis of the content of some documents. The conclusions regarding the effects generated by the accelerated technological evolution on the military

⁷ nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive science (NBIC)

communication, the multidimensional global conflict resolution paradigm and what “future war” means are presented in the final part.

Conflict resolution is a general approach that offers parties to the conflict tools to enable constructive management of a conflict or its resolution (Kriesberg & Neu, 2018).

The conflict management paradigm that dominated relations during the Cold War and the post-Cold War period was the first step in diversifying their resolution strategies, gradually being integrated into the conflict resolution paradigm. The latter has maximalist approaches and refers to long-term processes aimed at meeting basic needs and the intention to completely remove the roots of the conflict. The maximalist approach has developed a variety of other forms that act in parallel or conjugate under the name of *multidimensional conflict resolution paradigm*.

The evolution of the concept of conflict, as part of the existence of Humanity, has generated both a re-enactment of causal links and the need to think of another educational model, directions of action imposed by the progress of knowledge.

In the Era in which state and non-state actors use emerging technologies to generate material and human losses in the name of their own ideals, the concepts of communication and conflict have dramatically changed their valences. The way the war is viewed has changed its configuration, moving more and more towards the "gray area". Hybrid aggressions have imposed the combined action of force structures, which add to the variables of multicultural interaction the personality of the participants, the stressful environment and the transition from traditional to accelerated communication, assisted by AI, all these elements generating conflict situations of different types and with possible uncontrollable consequences in the future.

FROM PEACE TO WAR

Münster (Moelker R., Soeters J., 2006) - Communication and conflict in peacetime

We consider that the research conducted out by René Moelker, Joseph Soeters and Ulrich von Hagen on / with the participation of military and civilian personnel belonging to the German-Dutch Joint Corps in Munster, Germany, for a period of 10 years (1995-2005) is the starting point of

studying the way in which communication and variables of different types influence the interoperability in multinational military structures and implicitly the way in which conflicts can be managed at the level of multinational military structures. The methods, duration and number of people who participated in the research give a special value to this study.

Assuming that the frequency of contacts and mutual trust are likely to favor the sympathy feelings in between different cultures and in diminishing conflict situations, the findings of the study showed that

“values and images that are part of the cultural nucleus of a nation remain stable, with changes coming gradually and a basic condition for a successful military collaboration in between two nations is reciprocal communication and understanding, which is better resumed by the sympathy concept” (Moelker & Soeters, 2006, p. 516)

The study is an example of conflict resolution in a bi-national organization that has functioned “peacefully” with a “common history”, in which informal meetings and a participatory and mixed leadership style have induced a functioning with a level minimal conflict. The conflict-generating factors and variables once identified determined conflict negotiation and management strategies that had already been experienced and proved their effectiveness within multinational companies, being adapted to the military specifics.

Communication, conflict and interoperability in Wartime

But, in the theater of operations, the German-Dutch relationship got cooler and it was a case of an unbalanced (Hagen et al, 2003) bi-national cooperation, in a multinational Mission that led to an open, resounding conflict in international press. The variables that influenced this cooling of relationships, which were expected to be optimal after the ten years of common training and knowledge, are presented in detail in previously published contents by me (Palaghia R., 2018, 2020).

The main conclusion of the research mentioned above, and related with our subject, is as follows: a long and common pre-mission training is proving to be an important element, but not always sufficient to favor a higher degree of military multinational interoperability.

Standardized communication in multinational operations

A multidisciplinary study was conducted in 2001, at the Kabul International Airport KAIA (Afghanistan). The decision-making rhythm was sometimes criticized; all the deficiencies have been linked to the complex multinational chain of command and control. Each operational unit accomplished its own tasks relatively independently and thus, the coordination costs have been kept to a minimum.

The conclusion of the study is the following one: uniformity of the Air Forces in relation to technology (for example, Blackhawks, F-16) is reducing variation represented by the human. Part of the Air Force operations, the tasks are based mainly on standard objectives in order to evaluate the rightness and superiority of a certain solution. Standardization seems to be the way to reduce communication errors and conflict situations.

For the efficient development of conflict management processes, in all three exemplified cases, in addition to rational approaches, based on common interests and problem-solving procedures, the post-rational approaches of the Multidimensional Conflict Resolution Paradigm were used. Analyzing all three cases of communication and conflict management, I believe that more attention should be paid to the application of the concept of R2P (Responsibility to protect). This is a very controversial concept that has created tensions between the rights of the civilian population to be protected through military intervention and the principle of maintaining sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of the states. Legal, normative, politic and operational challenges make it difficult to implement R2P uniformly, being limited by power struggles between states (Amira, 2020).

CURRENT CONTEXT AND THE IMPLICATIONS OVER THE COMMUNICATION, CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND IN “THE WAR OF THE FUTURE”

For an easier understanding of the changes that are required at the educational and organizational level, from the perspective of the concepts of communication and conflict, I believe that the focus should be on the following issues:

- Economic and geostrategic ambitions for domination of some regional leaders are generating some rearrangement of global coalitions;
- The actions and attitudes of some global actors are more and more frequent, violating the norms of international law and perpetuating international divergences;
- Humanity faces overpopulation, demographic destabilization, resource constraints, climate change, mass migration;
- Cyber and hybrid threats, the widespread use of Artificial Intelligence and robotics, induce the general perception that the speed of technological development is uncorrelated with education, International Law and the possible effects of this technology on socio-human evolution.

These aspects, and not only, have repercussions on the stability and predictability of the International System with direct implications on how to achieve communication and conflict management.

For a more comprehensive understanding of the direction and needs (training, education, equipment, legislation, etc.) that the complex military environment of the coming decades will impose, different research groups have analyzed and, based on them, made predictions of possible future scenarios and recommendations.

The Global War on Terror has made it easier to move the concept of the *Egalitarian Information Environment* to a higher level. The Russian Defense Ministry defined information warfare as the ability

“to undermine political, economic and social systems; carry out mass psychological campaigns against the population of a state in order to destabilize society and the government and force a state to make decisions in the interests of the opponents”⁸

⁸ Russian Ministry of Defense (MOD) (2011), *Conceptual Views on the Activities of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in Information Space*,

In addition to the media already in use, these wars introduced the use of the internet and social media. Drew & Genest (2019, p. 226) accurately point out that the internet and social media

“leveled the playing field among powerful states, terrorist groups, and even individuals. This increasingly Egalitarian Information Environment has shaped, facilitated, and constrained the actions of all sides in the war on terrorism that has been raging since 2001”.

Despite economic, military, and technological advantages, the United States and its allies have not fared well in any of antiterrorist's wars. They failed to develop an adequate overall communications strategy to combat the messages that resonated with significant segments of the local populations in all three wars. In these cases, the revolutionary technology enabled the other side to get their message to the right audiences. Drew & Genest does an excellent job of demonstrating, in *“From Quills to Tweets-How America Communicates about War and Revolution”* (2019) how these three factors: messengers, messages, and media, “combine to create a platform for the communicator in chief and his proxies to communicate war” (p. 283).

The study conducted by Innovation Hub in between February and March 2020, “Innovation Hub War fighting 2040 - How will NATO have to compete in the future”, In order to inform SACT on how to develop capabilities and prepare for future operations, it provides us with a scientifically argued perspective on the directions in which the Army's (NATO) future preparation effort should be channeled.

It is no secret that the classic way of thinking about "military evolution" refers only to the improvement of existing military equipment. However, the new “Strategic IQ” concept imposes to fight an adversary using all instruments of power in harmony and must transform how the military fights and not what it fights with. The concept of “unrestricted war” is increasingly used, especially in international relations between international actors who hold economic and/or military supremacy.

<https://eng.mil.ru/en/science/publications/more.htm?id=10845074@cmsArticle>,
accessed on 29.03.2021.

Innovation Hub research is very interesting from at least two perspectives:

1. The first objective of the research team was to minimize interpersonal contacts. Another important element was the “anonymous confrontation of ideas” (Innovation Hub Report, 2020), which gave the participants the freedom not to always agree but also to feel that they are not judged by others.
2. The second objective was to avoid NATO as much as possible, western and military “cultural constructs”. This goal was achieved by consulting a worldwide audience with the help of an open online platform (Open Online Exercise supported by the University of South California), by selecting 16 experts in various fields, not involved in defense systems and belonging to different cultures and by co-opting in the study of students from different universities who analyzed and completed the ideas of experts through the platform, podcasts, blogs, questionnaires, etc.

In the model developed by the Innovation Branch on the management of future crises,

“there is a constant state of crisis and adversaries practice brinkmanship to “test the threshold of war and reveal “acceptable behavior” that NATO is willing to accept before invoking Article 5, allowing this type of adversary action may enable their behavior and inadvertently raise the threshold of war. This type of warfare resembles “shadow wars” and requires a whole-of-government approach to warfare”⁹.

From the perspective of sociological research, we appreciate that the only shortcoming of the Innovation Hub study is its development entirely in English, which can generate a limitation of participation and

⁹ Innovation Hub Report “Innovation Hub War fighting 2040 - How will NATO have to compete in the future” 2020, p. 13, <https://www.innovationhub-act.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/WF2040Report.pdf>, accessed on 29.03.2021.

contribution of non-native English speakers and, finally, an alteration of results.

The possible and interrelated aspects of the transformation of the concepts of communication, conflict and war of the future can take different forms, thus¹⁰:

- non-state actors can range from techno-guerrillas to quasi-regular armies with the full range of capabilities;
- The privatization of violence must be seen as a major threat (asymmetry of ethics and of will, very active in cyber domain);
- Possibility of the cyber domain to produce non-kinetic and non-lethal effects has transformed warfare and shifted the center of gravity to a battle of narratives among the population from conventional violent conflict;
- Sciences (NBIC) are clearly providing state and non-state actors some true game changers.
- The structure of the Western State government leads to lagging policies, laws, and regulations while debate carries not only for NBIC topics, but also for AI. NATO as a political-military alliance is in a strategic dilemma when it comes to waging war in the new era of warfare. The new era calls for accelerated decision-making, yet NATO is governed by consensus and organized with layers of bureaucracy;
- Uncoordinated policies from the member nations regarding disruptive and emerging technologies affects interoperability;
- To enhance interoperability and resilience, NATO must consider an inter-service intelligence capability, or Open Source Agency (OSA) that exploits open source intelligence (OSINT).
- With the advent of hypersonic capabilities and automation in warfare, NATO will require quicker decision-making.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 10-22.

- The use of the biological weapon is not something new, but the virulence with which social media is used to generate instability and mistrust amid epidemics has reached previously unimaginable levels. The COVID-19 Pandemic represents an opportunity (created or exploited) to generate or maintain, through the communicated contents, interstate tensions.

In this international context, the Romanian Strategic Defense Analysis (2020) substantiates a new concept of organization, staffing, endowment and training of the Romanian Army and took into account a number of black swan scenarios (global scenarios with national impact) and internal, developed by various think tanks, in determining the need for capabilities and how to train staff.

The accelerated technological evolution imposed a rethinking of the modernization and organization of the Romanian Army, which, in addition to capabilities, develops projects that will reconfigure the approach and implementation of communication and conflict resolution. Just a few examples of projects that require, in my opinion, a major rethinking of military communication and education in the military environment:

- Individual exoskeleton and human augmentation systems;
- Surveillance and early warning systems, with autonomous elements;
- Unmanned multi-role aircraft;
- Hybrid cloud model, edge computing, big data analytics, quantum computing;
- C4ISR-ISTAR system on a cloud-based architectural approach;
- Use of emerging technologies to shorten the decision-making cycle (artificial intelligence, virtual reality, etc.)

It is already well known that the communication and operation of different types of technology and technology is done through coded

software. These elements confer vulnerability and potential risk to national security.

CONCLUSIONS

Taking into account the elements of the evolution of the social, economic, military and climatic situation, the general conclusion is that the involvement in the process of continuous upgrading of the existing military technique should be reduced and the Western military way of thinking should be changed. The direction should be towards increasing the pace and speed of data analysis and towards the multidimensional form of risk management.

If states do not understand that decentralization and the introduction of AI in the decision-making process is a "must" then the gains on all levels of crisis and conflict will belong to actors whose time between decision and action is minimal. The efficiency and speed of institutional and operational reaction require both decentralization and a rethinking of the decision-making process. So far, at national level, we consider that no viable legislation and conduct has been implemented, given that information develops and spreads in geometric progression and the elaboration and implementation of doctrines can extend over a period of 8-10 years. The concrete action is far ahead of the accelerated evolution of NBIC weapons.

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NATO'S STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND MEASURES TO COUNTER DISINFORMATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. A VIEW FROM THE INSIDE

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ABSTRACT: The power of public diplomacy is perhaps more relevant than ever before. The current COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the opportunities and challenges for proper strategic communication within and between crucial international institutions. NATO has been actively involved in fighting this medical crisis by supplying critical materials, constructing hospitals and securing borders, thus supporting the other organizations' efforts in the field. As in the case of a pandemic good communication can save lives, another important dimension that the Alliance was targeting is represented by a due, transparent and coherent information campaign that must keep the wider public aware of the real development and consequences of the crisis and that is responsible for upholding NATO's already traditional values. To this end, the Alliance has been cooperating with the European Union, the United Nations, the G7 and civil society to counter disinformation and misinformation from both state and non-state actors and to deliver concrete, safe messages in a timely manner. For an in-depth analysis of the topic, we have discussed with a NATO official, willing to share with us the experience on how the Alliance is adapting to newly emerging communication threats.

Keywords: pandemic; strategic communication; NATO values; disinformation; civil society.

INTRODUCTION

The current COVID-19 pandemic is a good example of a crisis situation when proper and timely communication is required, among all the types of actors involved. By communication we understand a relation, a dialogue established between citizens and their national governments, the

media, non-state actors as well as the messages that come from relevant international organizations. During these time, online communication has increased rapidly to a significant extent. It soon became more frequently used as a communication channel by both individual and institutional users.

In *Leadership in times of crisis: A framework for assessment*, Boin, Kuipers, and Overdijk discuss crisis communication as part of the wider process called crisis management.

“During a crisis, communication with citizens and between organizations is incredibly important. (...) It should explain the crisis, its consequences, and what is being done to minimize the consequences. It should also offer “actionable advice,” explaining what should be done, by whom, and why.” (Boin et al., 2013, p. 85)

In *Theorizing Crisis Communication*, Timothy L. Sellnow and Matthew W. Seeger (2013, p. 105) noted that

“during crisis, organizations and agencies must manage complex elements of the communication process, including multiple stakeholders, interorganizational coordination, the diverse needs of various publics, and the evolving role of the mass media and new communication technologies.”

In the model below, four primary crisis communication dynamics were considered, describing an ongoing transactional dynamic between the various actors. The public is often the first source of information the media reports. As new technologies appear, the public provides more and more web-based, first-hand accounts of a crisis, thus playing the role of *citizen journalist* (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013).

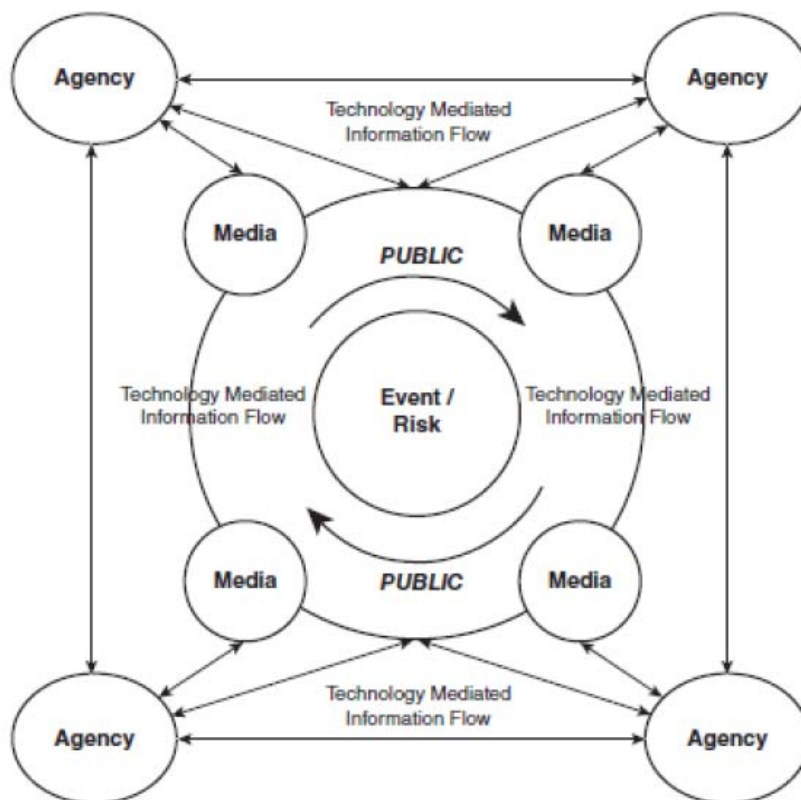


Figure 1. Four-channel model of communication

Source: Timothy L. Sellnow, Matthew W. Seeger (2013). *Theorizing Crisis Communication*, reprinted with permission from Pechta, Brandenburg and Seeger (2010).

NATO is among those organizations that have involved actively to manage the effects of the current outbreak, helping its Allies and partner countries alike, by supplying critical materials, building hospitals, transporting patients, providing medical expertise or securing borders. The Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC) accounts for NATO's main civil emergency response mechanism, operating on a 24/7 basis, coordinating requests and assistance. It ensures coordination in terms of assistance, including medical and financial support. The new 2020 Operational Plan determined additional initiatives for enhanced readiness to fight the current crisis. The NATO Pandemic Response Trust Fund managed by The NATO International Staff maintains an established

NATO'S STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND MEASURES TO COUNTER DISINFORMATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. A VIEW FROM THE INSIDE
stockpile of medical equipment and supplies for immediate relief to Allies or partners in need. (NATO, 2021).

NATO is also delivering correct, relevant messages to the public and responding to the already very popular phenomenon called disinformation or fake news. It has made increased use of online channels and it is calling for the civil society to engage in this multilateral dialogue, or networked crisis communication.

DESIGN OF THE RESEARCH (METHODOLOGY)

Research on the topic has involved both qualitative and quantitative methodology instruments. Qualitatively speaking, we aimed to identify NATO's specific approach and mechanisms to respond to disinformation. We analyzed the language used in part of the organization's narratives, revealing expressions, syntagma of particular relevance, comparing and contrasting with the language in hostile narratives about NATO. Also, interviewing a NATO official provided us with useful insight over the subject, with a view from inside. The interview was conducted online, in written form.

Quantitatively, we developed an online opinion survey on the Romanian public's perception about disinformation on NATO-related topics and the effectiveness of the Alliance's response and crisis management. Respondents were selected from various parts of the country, they were both men and women, aged between 18 and 67, from urban and rural areas. A significant part has a background in International Relations, European Studies, Geopolitics or Communication, but this was not the criteria for the entire sample, as the intention was to cover a broader audience.

NATO'S APPROACH TO DISINFORMATION: UNDERSTAND AND ENGAGE

Disinformation or anti-NATO propaganda ranks among the most serious challenges the Alliance is confronting with. It is not something new; it increased after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the actual pandemic has been exploited as a means to reinforce the attacks on NATO's image and credibility among the wider public.

As defined by NATO, disinformation is *the deliberate creation and dissemination of false and/or manipulated information with the intent to deceive or*

mislead (NATO, 2020). The 2018 Brussels Summit Declaration included disinformation campaigns on the list of *hybrid challenges* (NATO, 2018).

To respond to such misleading information, NATO is debunking disinformation narratives, it is delivering factual, credible public communications, based on its core democratic values and it calls for a sensitive, critical attitude from anyone who comes across a potentially false information. NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence designed a graphic representation of how debunking actually functions (NATO StratCom COE, 2021). We present it below:

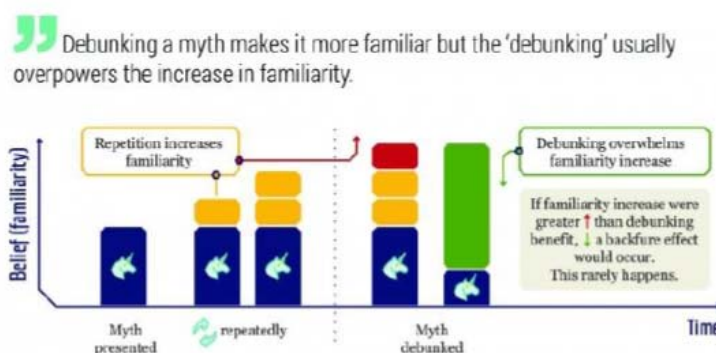


Figure 2. *How debunking functions*

Source: NATO’s Strategic Communications Center of Excellence. (2021), Fact-checking and debunking. A best practice guide to dealing with disinformation

More precisely, the Alliance’s approach to fake news employs a two-step model called *Understand and Engage*. The *Understand* function refers to Information Environment Assessments whose aim is to track, monitor and analyze relevant information regarding NATO’s activity, assessing the effectiveness of its communications.

Disinformation has been exploited by both state and non-state actors, through digital marketing techniques that involved psychological elements, in order to create an alternative story to the real facts. Some narratives contained both true and false information, that went beyond people’s natural ability to distinguish between the two.

Based on the perspectives gathered in the first stage, the *Engage* function helps NATO representatives to prepare and adapt their strategic communications countering malicious narratives and engaging to a wider audience. In the spirit of unity and solidarity, NATO’s coordination with

Allies and partner countries but also with the civil society and other international organizations is crucial to address the fast-developing challenge of disinformation.

NATO has taken concrete action identified in the number of statements, rebuttals, corrections and briefings, it has enhanced digital communications related to the pandemic across all platforms, it has turned public diplomacy events into online debates and also communications in the Russian language have been enhanced (NATO, 2020).

To exemplify, one of the hostile narratives about NATO that circulated in the media in the context of the coronavirus pandemic is related to the false claims that an outbreak within NATO's multinational battlegroup in Lithuania determined the organization's decision to withdraw its troops. The news was based on a fake letter from NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg addressed to the Lithuanian Ministers of Defense Raimundas Karoblis: (a document of poor quality, with formatting, syntax and grammatical errors rendering its credibility questionable) and a manipulated YouTube video recontextualizing a press conference held by the SG in April 2020. To this, as well as to other popular myths, NATO responded with factual statements, in a clear and concise language, as visible in the figure below, an extract from a NATO Factsheet. Expressions like "robust measures", "minimise risks", "remain vigilant", "sensible precautions", "monitoring" demonstrate the Alliance's commitment to support the fight against the worldwide consequences of the pandemic (NATO Factsheet, 2020).



Figure 3. Myth 4: NATO exercise spread COVID-19 virus

Source: NATO. (2020), Russia's Top Five Myths about NATO & COVID-19-Factsheet

During the interview, the official referred to NATO Secretary General's remarks, where he noted that *the pandemic has led to an increase in disinformation and propaganda, aiming to undermine our democracies and deepen divisions. We are also seeing new trends, including a growing convergence between Russian and Chinese anti-Western narratives suggesting that NATO Allies are responsible for the virus. And that authoritarian regimes are better than democracies at keeping their people safe. During the peak of the pandemic (March-June 2020) we saw a four-fold increase in such narratives used by both Russia and China. These disinformation efforts target all of us, and the rules-based international order. And we all have a stake in telling the truth, and upholding our values through global solidarity. So, NATO will continue to raise awareness and counter false narratives with facts, with our values, and with concrete actions* (NATO, 2020).

NATO COOPERATES

In its approach to counter the fake news phenomenon, NATO, through its Public Diplomacy Division, has been cooperating with the EU through the East StratCom Taskforce (part of the European External Action Service) and the European Commission.

As NATO Deputy Secretary General, Mircea Geoană affirmed in his speech at the NATO Lessons Learned conference that *we cannot do it alone. We need each other. We need each other at NATO. We need cooperation amongst our governments and our civil societies. We also need to cooperate with the European Union, with the UN, which my colleagues in the Public Diplomacy Division are actively doing* (Mircea Geoană, 2021).

However, he reckoned that, in the midst of the crisis, *not everything has been as successful. We have to be honest here. The truth is, we were not adequately prepared for a global health crisis on this scale. (...) NATO and Allies quickly realised we needed to be better prepared for a second wave* (Mircea Geoană, 2021).

A report from the European Parliament noted that: *NATO was fast to react, and used all the instruments in its toolbox to assist Allied countries and partners. From coordinating the transport of medicines and supplies, to launching scientific programmes to study the virus, NATO has again proven its value in times of crisis. Close European Union (EU) and NATO coordination during the crisis was equally helpful in ensuring a coherent, civil-military approach* (European Parliament, 2020).

In July 2020, NATO launched a social media campaign to raise awareness and boost resilience against disinformation in the context of the

COVID-19 pandemic. The campaign was run in Bosnian, Czech, English, French and Russian languages and social media posts reached out especially to the youth.

NATO has also invited NGOs, the epistemic community and the academia to submit, by the end of 2020, proposals of projects meant to enhance people's resilience to disinformation. 30 out of 62 were selected, ranging from handbooks, analytical studies, online education initiatives and techniques to detect and counter fake news (The Secretary General's Annual Report 2020).

The NATO official discussed in the interview the key role played by the free media in transmitting accurate information, which accounts for *an essential element of our freedom*. The current health crisis should not be exploited for propaganda and disinformation, as *this is dangerous and irresponsible*.

NATO engages with media to inform about its response to COVID-19, reaching to a potential audience of hundreds of millions of people. The organization has conducted media briefings in multiple countries, including Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine and the Western Balkans, focusing on disinformation and NATO's contribution to the fight against COVID-19, the official added.

Additionally, the representative mentioned in the interview a recent survey covering 25 countries, in which eighty-six percent of the citizens reported being exposed to fake news. Among them, nearly nine in ten reported having initially believed that the news was real.

The NATO official also briefed us about a number of useful tips to spot and counter disinformation:

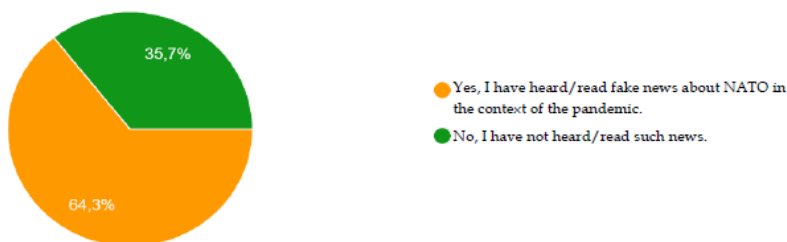
- Proactive communications (identifying gaps in knowledge; introducing accurate facts early and on a regular basis);
- Pre-bunking (warning people about disinformation or conspiracy theories);
- Identifying common sources of disinformation (websites or authors);
- Reporting and countering disinformation in the media environment where it started spreading;
- -Prioritizing the news which are worth debunking; distinguish them from those that have not reached a significantly quantitative audience.

THE ROMANIAN YOUTH RESPONDS

In March 2021 we started an online survey about Romanians' perception of disinformation on NATO-related topics and the effectiveness of the measures the Alliance has taken so far to address this issue. Results are partial, but they do provide a valuable insight of how people, especially the Romanian youth perceives the phenomenon.

1. Are you aware of the fake news about NATO in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (eg. NATO exercises that might have spread the virus in Lithuania, in April 2020)?

70 de răspunsuri

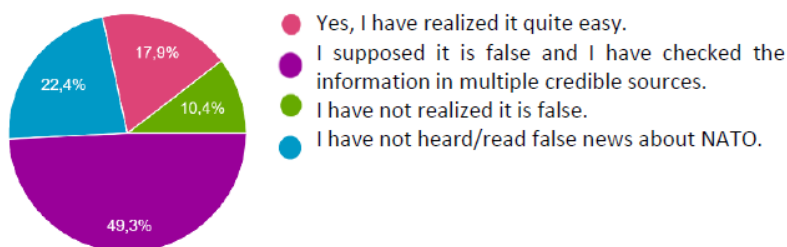


Preliminary investigation concluded that most of the respondents (64.3%) were aware of anti-NATO narratives, they had either read or heard such news in the actual pandemic context.

Confronted with such news, 49.3% of the people surveyed have assumed it is a false information and they checked it in multiple credible sources.

When reading such news, have you realized it is fake news?

67 de răspunsuri

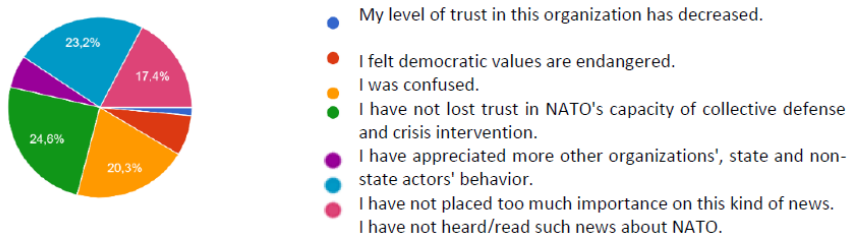


Questioned about the feelings they have had after reading a false news about NATO, 24.6% responded they have not lost their trust in the

Alliance's capacity to ensure collective defense and to intervene in a crisis situation. Other 23.2% have not given too much importance to the news, while 20.3% felt confused about the information. A smaller percentage (7.2%) felt the democratic values were endangered.

3. How did you feel after reading such news?

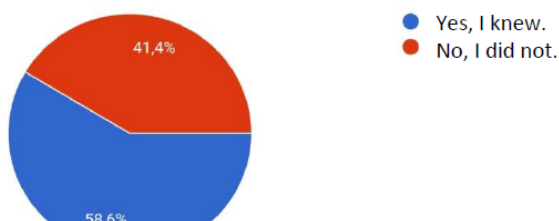
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The majority (58.6%) knew that NATO involves actively in managing the effects of the pandemic, but a significant proportion of 41.4% were not aware of that.

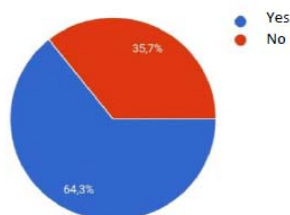
4. Did you know that NATO is actively involved in managing the COVID-19 pandemic, by supplying critical materials (medical equipment, protective masks), constructing hospitals and ensuring border security on the Allied territory?

70 answers



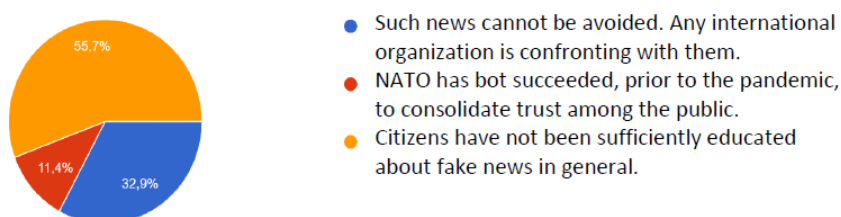
It resulted that, in the public's opinion, NATO has acted relatively efficient so far to counter disinformation about its own activity (through communications, media articles, posts, official statements).

5. Besides providing material assistance, NATO is seeking to combat online disinformation, including in the current pandemic context. From everything you have heard/read online (NATO's official website, social media, online press), do you consider that the organization has acted efficiently in countering fake news about its own activity (through communications, articles, posts, statements etc.)?



The most favored answer (55.7% of the respondents) to the question regarding the potential source for the popularity of fake news was that citizens have not been sufficiently educated about the disinformation in general. Other 32.9% considered that such news cannot be avoided, as any international organization is confronting with this challenge. 11.4% said that, prior to the outbreak, NATO has not managed to consolidate people's trust in the Alliance.

6. Generally speaking, what do you think the credibility/popularity of such false information about NATO relates to?



NATO-EU crisis communication represented another point of interest in our survey. The majority of the people (62.9%) answered that additional efforts from both organizations is required to fight disinformation. 20 % felt the two did not communicate efficiently with each other, while only 17.1% said that NATO and EU messages coincided to a large extent.

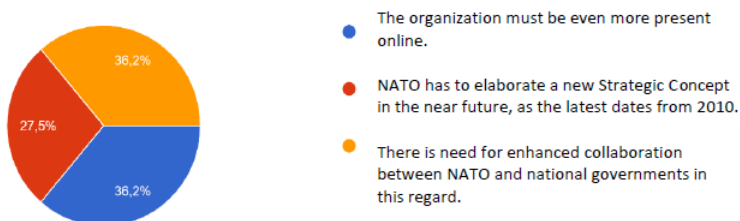
7. Managing the current crisis is a global issue. NATO is cooperating with other international organizations in this regard. How do you appreciate communication between NATO and EU representatives in the context generated by the COVID-19 pandemic?



Moreover, people believed (36.2%) that NATO should be more present online as to engage better. Also, 36.2% thought there is need for enhanced cooperation between NATO and national governments in the context generated by COVID-19. 27.5% responded that the Alliance should consider elaborating a new Strategic Concept, as the latest dates back to 2010.

8. How do you appreciate NATO must act to counter fake news about its own activity in the context of the actual pandemic?

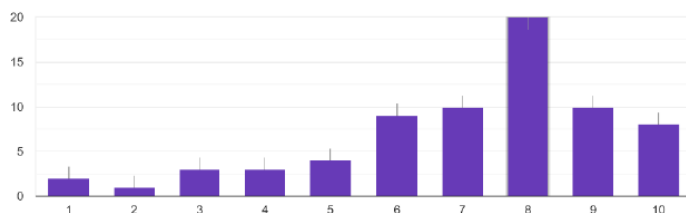
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On a scale from 1 to 10, disinformation ranked 8 (in most people's opinion), thus confirming the official NATO perception that false news actually represents a significant threat to the Alliance's credibility.

9. On a scale from 1 to 10, how important do you consider the fake news phenomenon among the challenges NATO is currently confronting with?

70 de răspunsuri



CONCLUSIONS

Generally speaking, Romanian people's opinion aligns to NATO's view that disinformation is among the most serious challenges that the Alliance is confronting with nowadays. It is not a new phenomenon, but its potential has been exploited intensively during the current outbreak, to discredit the North Atlantic Alliance.

NATO is actively involving in countering propaganda, including in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, by assessing the information environment and responding with fact-based, transparent communications in a timely manner.

Cooperation with other international actors, including the European Union, is a must; it has been traditionally valued as a strategic pillar of the transatlantic relation to engage efficiently and uniformly and the current crisis makes no exception to this rule.

NATO also highlights the need for enhanced cooperation with all the types of stakeholders, including the civil society, the academic environment, NGOs and the private sector.

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THE MIGRATION CRISIS IN THE PRESS. FRAMING THE NEWS ON THE VOICELESS IN THE UK

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ABSTRACT: The latest migration crisis revealed that the debate on migrants, immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers is heavily politicized and undoubtedly influenced by media. In the last 5 years, we witnessed huge influxes of refugees in Europe. These people on the move have been trying to escape conflict and persecution from a war-torn land, as an act of despair. Their journey is often a dramatic one, initially largely covered by media. Nevertheless, from the initial sympathy for their traumatic experiences and the focus on humanitarian aid, the narratives have dramatically changed, portraying the newcomers as threats to security in EU, jobs' thieves jeopardizing the stability of labour markets, sources of emotional distress in receiving communities, etc. Unfortunately, upon their arrival and struggling to find protection and access to integration programs, their voices were almost unheard in the press. The present article aims to reveal that the rhetorical "othering" of immigrants had been present in the British press, but became dominant in the Leave campaign, including Farage's infamous poster, urging the British citizens to take back control of borders. The negative portraying of the newcomers by the British media is analysed as a relevant case study for media setting the agenda for the public.

Keywords: migration crisis; media coverage; framing the news; UK press

INTRODUCTION

Since 2015, we are facing a new migration crisis, with almost 1 million persons embarked into dangerous journeys. According to Statista (www.statista.com, 2020) it was estimated that eight thousand people lost their lives in the attempt of fleeing their country and the Mediterranean Sea became the deadliest migration route.

Despite the initial enthusiasm that Europe will manage these inflows properly (highly influenced by the *open doors* policy promoted by the

German chancellor Merkel, '*we can do this*'), we witnessed a lack of consensus, a divide between the European south, overwhelmed by the asymmetric burden of people in need for humanitarian support, and the European north, focused on securing borders (even a closing borders approach in Hungary or Slovenia) and relocating the new comers, according to a specific quotas' system. Therefore, solidarity, one of the basic principle of the EU, has been seriously challenged, fuelling the nationalistic parties' rhetoric – *migrants as security and socio-cultural threats*.

In Europe the entire debate on migrants, immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers was heavily politicized and undoubtedly influenced by media. In time of crisis, we expect "the public opinion to depend on the mediated narratives, in an attempt to figure out what was going on at the borders of EU" (Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017 in Cooper et al, 2020, p.3). Moreover, from the initial sympathy for their traumatic experiences and the focus on humanitarian aid, the narratives have dramatically changed, portraying the newcomers as threats to security in EU, jobs' thieves jeopardizing the stability of labour markets, sources of emotional distress in receiving communities, etc. The political lack of consensus and the media focused on presenting the newcomers as "the others" significantly impacted the European citizens. The general discontent with the decision makers' actions towards migrants was clearly revealed in Spring 2016 Global Attitudes Survey: 94% of Greeks, 70% of UK citizens and 63% of Dutch citizens were disapproving the EU's handling of the refugees. If we refer to the public opinion on immigrants, in 2014 the Eurobarometer 81 revealed that immigration was considered on the fourth place as matter of concern for EU citizens, with an increase of 3% from the previous year (European Commission, 2014). In 2020, immigration ranked second as a matter of concern, according to Standard Eurobarometer 93.

We do share the opinion that the manner in which migrants and migration are described, labelled and represented matters. Moreover, the role played by the media in constructing meanings, building perceptions and attitudes is also relevant – "reporting and commentary does not just reflect the events that are happening and views that are already 'out there', it actively contributes to and constructs our understanding of what events mean (Hall, 1997). In this way it shapes the range of possibilities for understanding what the story is on migration, and the way we perceive migrants and refugees" (UNCHR, 2017, p.13).

THE MIGRATION CRISIS IN THE EUROPEAN PRESS

Media representations of asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants matter in the sense of mediating the public conversation, influencing the negative or positive perceptions. According to the report carried out for the Council of Europe, "the European press played a central role in framing refugees' and migrants' arrival to European shores in 2015 as a crisis for Europe" (Giourgiou & Zaborowski, 2017, p. 5). Labelling the phenomenon as a crisis, media induced a sense of unpreparedness in terms of migration management, leading to public hostility towards the newcomers. "In times of uncertainty people orient themselves towards medially communicated interpretations" (Perse, 2001, in Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017, p. 1750). It might lead to a situation in which "strong negative framing of immigration prevails under the overall perspective that migration is a problem to be addressed, a liability to be mitigated, a challenge to be 'tackled' rather than a positive phenomenon that opens up real possibilities" (Martin-Royo-Martin & Van Dijk 1997; van Leeuwen & Wodak 1999 in IOM, 2017, p. 3). The role of media in portraying the migrants is also stressed by Tazreena, because "the construction of migrants as victims at best, and as cultural and security threats at worst, particularly in the case of Muslim refugees, not only assists in their dehumanisation, but it also legitimises actions taken against them through the perpetuation of a particular discourse on the European Self and the non-European Other" (Tazreena, 2018, p. 7).

Across Europe, we could also find the conflation of terms migrant and refugees, blurring the relevant differences in terms of *push* and *pull* factors, status, etc. which enabled the public to perceive the whole wave of newcomers as victims or sources of instability. A relevant example was found in the British press, where "frequent elision in news coverage of migrants with asylum seekers and refugees, and at times the terms appear to be used interchangeably" (Monroe & Ramsay, 2017, p. 83).

The researchers' interest in studying the media impact on public opinion has increased in the past years, even if most of the analyses referred to media coverage of the crisis. (Cooper et al, 2020, p. 3). A notable exception is made by the report carried out by Jan Semotam (2014), focusing on the impact of media discourse on the public.

The present article will not address the migration representations in social media and entertainment, even though we fully agree that by neglecting these parts of the media reality, we end up ignoring the fact that a large portion of European audience uses exclusively new media or, a mix of new media and traditional press.

Our attention was drawn by the limited number of research reports on the topic – we could have identified 5 comprehensive reports launched since 2015 up to present. A synthesis of the main findings will reveal the shortcomings of media in portraying the phenomenon, the tendencies to focus on the negative outcomes of migration flows, as well a growing concern for balanced reporting, documented journalism, and public-private partnerships for reducing stereotypes and exclusion that may compromise all the efforts related to integration programs.

The report edited by White in 2015 pleaded for inclusive media networks, a kind of partnership between mainstream media and independent journalists – “it is time to talk about a media “burden sharing” where media institutions, rather than chasing the same stories, divide the coverage of the human suffering” (White, 2015, p. 2). The inconvenient truth related to media coverage of the migration crisis referred to:

- journalism struggling to face the pressure induced by the weakening media economy. Thus, balanced reporting is replaced by agenda setting for the public;
- political bias and opportunism that drives the news agenda (agenda setting and framing the news has become dominant in the international press);
- the dangers of hate-speech, stereotyping and social exclusion of refugees and migrants (insufficiently addressed by monitoring agencies or international journalist networks, focused on ethical journalism).

Despite all these negative influences, the report revealed also an optimistic perspective on “inspiring examples of careful, sensitive and ethical journalism that have shown empathy for the victims” (White, 2015, p. 6) and signals the need for spill over effects from responsible journalism worldwide, under the principles of accuracy, independence, impartiality, humanity and accountability.

Another important study carried out in 2017 under UNCHR umbrella – *Press Coverage of the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in the EU: A Content Analysis*

of *Five European Countries* - identified relevant differences related to media coverage on migrants and refugees in Europe, thus the key findings are synthesized below:

- a general positive portraying of the newcomers, focused on humanitarian themes in Sweden, opposed to the highly negative media coverage in UK, leading to the preponderance of negative frames and the editorializing in favour of *Fortress Europe* approaches;
- in countries like Spain, Italy and Sweden, the press was quite homogenous, while in UK, it was noticed again, the most polarized coverage (a clear outlier);
- in general, EU institutions were presented as rigid, bureaucratic and divided;
- the degree to which asylum and immigration is subject to political contestation is a key factor structuring coverage (again, in UK);
- the migrant success stories are rarely visible in the European press, except for the Swedish or German cases. More involvement in the migrants' experiences might lead to increased objectivity;
- in the sample investigated, only 3.1% of articles mentioned the need to address the push factors directly via conflict resolution strategies (a focus on push and pull factors might contribute significantly to proper distinctions among the various categories of persons involved in migration flows).

The report carried out by Georgiou & Zaborowski for the Council of Europe in 2017 adds some new insights on the relevance and impact of media coverage of the migration crisis, by proposing a strategy to be implemented by European and international institutions. The proposed strategy aims to cover the following areas:

- *"Initiatives and campaigns for more inclusiveness in the media* (focusing on migrants' stories rather than on alarming news on the crisis, promoting inclusive and comprehensive approach on both arrival and integration of the newcomers),
- *Contextual reporting on the crisis* (focusing on professional reporting on the push factors),

- *Inclusion of diverse voices* (focusing on transforming migrants into participants rather than objects of media coverage),
- *Support and dissemination of information on migrant and refugee media and communication practices* (focusing on migrant journalist' training and networking with mainstream media),
- *Share research on media coverage of "the refugee/migration crisis"* - focusing on reducing the presence and impact of unfair and stereotypical reporting of migrants" (Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017, pp. 16-17).

The study carried out under IOM umbrella recommends 5 intervention measures for a balanced perspective on newcomers):

1. "Monitoring activities on media coverage in order to prevent stereotypical, negative expressions referring to the ethnic origin of suspects, for instance, in crime reports or emphasizing the legal stay status of a person;
2. Constant efforts to ensure a balanced reporting that covers different aspects of migration (from borders crossing to housing, religion, employment, examples of successful artists, professionals and entrepreneurs);
3. Avoidance of simplistic generalized reporting and more focus on comprehensive reporting based on a variety of credible sources;
4. Recruitment of migrant journalists needs to be prioritized through appropriate traineeship and study to work schemes;
5. Training programs provided to all journalists and media professionals at Universities, but also as part of their lifelong learning if they are freelancers" (Triandafyllidou, 2017, pp. 2-3).

Finally, the study carried out by Eberl et al. focused on the impact of media coverage on audiences, based on the two main strands of research in this field: *agenda setting* (classical assertion that news tells us what to think about) and *framing* (the news also tells us how to think about things). The report revealed facts like:

- "migrant groups are generally underrepresented,
- migrants are often framed as either economic, cultural, or criminal threats and thus covered in a highly unfavourable way,

- the reduced visibility of immigration issues and migrant groups, however, may vary across time, across media outlets or genres, and between countries,
- media outlets' format and political leaning can strongly shape the immigration media discourses in Europe,
- the mostly negative coverage of immigration can lead to activation of stereotypical cognitions of migrant groups" (Eberl et al., 2018, p. 217-218).

We do share the opinion that that media coverage should be seen in the context of both the changing dynamics of migration and unfolding policy debates. (Allen, 2016, p.19). Still, media and journalists should focus on this multifaceted phenomenon in an ethical, balanced, and accountable manner.

THE NEGATIVE PORTRAYING OF THE NEWCOMERS IN UK - A CASE STUDY

Since first waves of migration, UK has alternated the restrictive policies with the open doors ones (with a notable preferential system for the highly skilled), as another example of British exceptionalism. In the Brexit debate, "the scale of EU migration and the UK's ability to restrict access of low-skilled EU migrants to the UK labour market was a key issue" (Allen, 2016, p. 20).

Nevertheless, the latest migration crisis heated up the emotional discourse against the newcomers, despite the relevant statistics on migrants' contribution to the British economy. The focus on mass migration, illegal status and welfare tourism became dominant on the political discourse, media coverage and public perceptions. The press increasingly described "the phenomenon of immigration in terms of its scale, pace, and direction rather than legality" (Allen, 2016, p. 13). Moreover, media coverage frequently identifies "the number of migrants (either actual or potential) as a problem" (Allen, 2016, p. 14).

The dominant negative portraying of newcomers in Europe has been highlighted by several researchers (Berry et al., 2015; King & Lulle, 2016; Meltzer et al., 2017; Hargrave & Dempster, 2017; Triandafyllidou, 2017; Eberl et al., 2018) and the UK has been analysed as a relevant case study in Europe.

In the last 20 years, migration has been one of the most salient and emotive themes in the public debate in the UK and it has involved a variety of stakeholders: policy makers, researchers, entrepreneurs, civil society and journalists. In 2011, Sarah Spencer discussed the migration debate and concluded that

“in order to gain public support for reforms in migration policy we need to explain migration peculiarities, policy constraints and the rationale behind authorities’ actions. The author underlined that the domestic policy is also to be developed under constraints of the international and European law in the Human Rights field, and free movement of EU citizens.” (Spencer, 2011 in Cramarencu, 2012, p. 178)

British media has played an important role in both agenda setting, as well as framing the news on migrants. The UK press is considered one of the most negative and polarized in Europe (Taylor, 2014; Crawley et al, 2016; UNCHR, 2017; Walter, 2019), and this negative rhetoric became dominant in the Brexit campaign, since “Britain’s right-wing media was uniquely aggressively in its campaigns against refugees and migrants” (UNCHR, 2017, p. 1). Taking into account that any referendum provides a binary choice—*yes or no/in or out*—, we might expect polarized media coverage, and Brexit made no exception.

One of the most comprehensive analysis of the migrants’ portraying in the British press was carried out by William Allen for The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, in 2016, following the previous similar study published in 2013. The key trends identified referred to:

- Journalists tend to favour their role of framing the news on migrants, rather than objectively reporting,
- Media often blames the politicians for scale of migration flows and migrants for their *illegal* status,
- Media coverage sharply increased after the Conservative coalition set up measures to reduce net migration,
- More focus on controlling the flows and less on legal migration reporting,

- Dominant coverage on migrants from Eastern countries, accessing the British labour market (especially after 2013),
- The latest refugees' crisis largely covered, with Syrian migrants dominating the headlines.

Since 2010, the focus on the impact of the economic crisis in the British press has been gradually shifted to one of the most restrictive asylum and immigration systems in Western Europe. According to Allen, "when British newspapers have chosen to describe immigration in some additional way over the 2006-2015 period, about 15% of the time they explicitly use the word 'mass'. This is closely followed by 'net' and 'illegal'." (Allen, 2016, p. 7). The objective related to the reduction of the net migration data, set up by the Conservative coalition coincided with media coverage on mass migration, flows, illegal entries and European migration. Moreover, an UNCHR's comparative study revealed that "in UK 68.6% of political sourcing came from the coalition government whilst the main voice explicitly opposing government policy came from UKIP (9.3%)" (UNCHR, 2017, p. 7). The same report revealed that the dominant tone in the news is given by British politicians, while EU's or other international institutions', including NGO's, are almost invisible. The refugees' voice is hardly present and illustrates the sufferings, the trauma of the long journey to UK and the gratitude for the host country. "This general trend contributes to the overarching narrative that does not seek to see the person behind the label applied to them and has designated migrants and refugees as victims and people incapable of helping themselves" (CCME, 2017, p. 38).

"While refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants and migrants' voices are excluded from the mediated debate, there can be an absence of empathy and understanding" (Cooper et al, 2020, p. 18), so the public is deprived of a balanced, accountable reporting on the refugees' experiences.

The role of migration debate in the 2016 referendum cannot be ignored. According to Report 5 carried out by Loughborough University, throughout the referendum campaign three issues were dominant in the media: the economy (the cost of EU membership), immigration (massive inflows, irregular migration, Eastern migration), and the conduct of the campaign itself (for both *Leave* and *Remain* campaigns). In another study carried out in 2017 we found that "almost a third of all referendum-related

articles referenced immigration, compared to 11% that referenced health, 6% education, and 4% the environment” (Moore & Ramsay, 2017, p. 27).

The UK’s referendum to leave the EU “was considered unequivocal demonstration of the anti-establishment sentiments, xenophobia, populism, and Euroscepticism that had already emerged elsewhere across Europe at this time” (Hobolt, 2016, p. 4). Moreover, “[f]orty years of threats to national identity, fears of British democracy at risk, and so on, have provided fertile ground in which EU-linked anti-immigration rhetoric has taken root.” (Todd in Monroe, 2018, p. 22). The *Remain* campaign focused on the economic costs of British withdrawal (the uncertainties related to a Brexit agreement with EU), while the *Leave* campaign was built up on immigration issues and claimed the urgent need to take back control of borders.

The *Leave* discourse significantly contributed to “blurring the boundaries between EU and non-EU, economic and humanitarian, and legal and illegal migration” (Garret, 2019). The discriminatory attitudes towards migrants led the *Leave* campaigners to frequently portray these migrants “as both economic and security threats, setting boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Stewart and Mason, 2016; Virdee and McGeveer, 2018 in Cooper et al 2020, p. 2).

The anti-immigration attitude was clear before the Brexit referendum, as in 2013, an IPSO Mori poll revealed that almost 50% of the respondents considered immigration as the most pressing issue for the British society. 2 years later, in 2016, a Pew Survey showed that 70% of the UK citizens were disapproving of how the EU was dealing with the refugee crisis. Again, before the referendum, the British press referred to the inflows of refugees and asylum seekers, mainly as migrants, leading to a well-orchestrated confusion in the general public. This continuum of fears and uncertainties have been fuelled by the fact that the majority of the British press preferred the term *migrant* instead of *refugee*, while covering the stories related to the people fleeing war torn zones in the Middle East.

Reporting on immigration flows and immigration policy might be in line with the general interest shared by political leader and the public. But, framing the news in order to constantly blame the newcomers is far from ethical and balanced journalism. We should also make a distinction between the official *Leave* campaign referring less directly to the current refugee crisis and more on the EU migration and mobility (the withdrawal

from EU impacting dramatically both British citizen and their fellow EU citizens) and the unofficial one carried out by UKIP, abundant in negative labelling – the most common migrant-related problems were *terrorism, violence, security threats*. The latter contribution to setting the tone in the British press is stressed by Walter (2019) and it actually caused the strongest reactions in the British and international press, with the most controversial campaign poster, meaning the “Breaking Point” poster, which was presented by Nigel Farage on his campaign bus, a week before Referendum day.

In 2017, Monroe & Ramsay conducted a research covering more than 14,000 articles related to the Brexit referendum, referring to topics such as: the economy, immigration, sovereignty, dishonesty, fear, and the ‘Establishment’. Blaming the migrants for almost all the socio-economic problems of the British society seemed to fuel the entire *Leave* campaigners’ rhetoric. From the impact of new comers on the labour market (thieves of British jobs, net beneficiaries of unemployment benefits, responsible for social dumping and unfair competition due to low wages), to the one on the real estate market (pressure for increased property prices, preferential treatment for accessing Council houses), to negative impact on the NHS (net beneficiaries of medical services), up to security issues (migrants as smugglers, violent persons, crime offenders) and societal issues (reducing quality of life, weakening community solidarity, lowering educational and cultural standards), all the above were invoked in the negative framing orchestrated by political leaders and media, as well.

In contrast, the *Remain* campaigners did not directly discuss the ongoing refugee crisis and focus on the economic costs of leaving the European Single Market. Even if the debate about immigration was being intensified by the *Leave* campaigners, the *Remain* campaign leaders responded defensively rather than positively (focusing on the benefits of immigration could have counterbalanced the dominant negative rhetoric). Still, we should remind the isolated positive cases for immigration by leaders like Jeremy Corbyn (‘migration actually is a plus to our economy’), Tony Blair (East Europeans ‘contribute far more in taxes than they ever take in benefits’) and Gordon Brown Gordon (‘illegal migration was best controlled within the EU not outside it’) (Monroe & Ramsay, 2017, p. 69).

Thus, the pre-existent negative sentiments towards immigration have been activated by *Leave* press campaign, in the context of the refugee crisis,

despite the fact that the UK has already opted out of common EU asylum policies and the UK leaders were the most vocal against quota systems of relocating refugees. The *Leave* campaigners, mainly UKIP leaders (newly self-proclaimed *national saviours*) intentionally induced in the voters' perceptions the false expectation that Brexit will definitely reduce the immigration' pressure in the UK.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In Europe, the latest migration crisis was largely covered by media. Unfortunately, from the initial sympathy for their traumatic experiences and the focus on humanitarian aid, the narratives have dramatically changed, portraying the newcomers as threats to security in the EU (frequently associated with the rise of terrorism), job thieves jeopardizing the stability of labour markets, sources of emotional distress in receiving communities.

Highlighting persisting problems in media coverage is necessary for a relevant change in today's journalism. Therefore, a better understanding of the news media coverage and its effects on the general public, on the voters is crucial, as we witness nationalist and anti-EU sentiments on the rise throughout Europe.

Migrants and refugees need to speak for themselves, for a more balanced and accurate understanding of their experiences in the home country, transit countries and host countries, as well. Giving a voice to the voiceless is vital for accountable and ethical journalism nowadays. A number of measures can be taken to ensure balanced coverage of migration issues and increase migrant journalists' participation in mainstream media.

The British press case study is relevant from the perspective of media involvement in setting the agenda for the public, in the troubling period of the Brexit referendum. If considered a lesson learnt, the media coverage of the Brexit campaign may eventually set the tone of the above-mentioned change in journalism worldwide.

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FIRST MONTH: ANTICOID-19 VACCINATION CAMPAIGN PRESENTED IN CLUJ-NAPOCA'S ONLINE NEWSPAPERS

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ABSTRACT: The health crisis brought about by COVID-19 has generated a heightened need for information, whether we are talking about symptoms, treatment or vaccination. On 27 December 2020, the European Union's states started the vaccination campaign. The aim of this article is to analyse how the vaccination campaign was presented in online local newspapers from Cluj-Napoca in the first 30 days. The city of Cluj-Napoca was selected because it has one of the biggest centres of treatment and vaccination in the country and benefits from a variety of local online newspapers. Our study reveals that all of the newspapers analysed included daily facts regarding the selected topic, but using various approaches and touching upon different perspectives of the subject.

Keywords: anticovid-19 vaccination campaign, online local newspapers, social sphere, Cluj-Napoca, information, European Union

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 remains a serious topic, posing an era-defining challenge to public health and the global economy. Emerging in late 2019 in China (World Health Organization 1, 2020), the novel corona virus quickly spread worldwide, with over 100 mil. cases by the end of 2020. Coronaviruses are distinct from both influenza viruses and the HIV, but also from ZIKA, Ebola, and other viruses in recent history. While this is the third coronavirus outbreak in the past two decades, the prior two had a modest impact (Kirlin, 2020). SARS (originating in China, 2002–2003) killed 774

globally, and MERS (originating in Saudi Arabia, 2012) killed 858 globally (Cleveland Clinic, 2020).

Countries all over the world immediately reacted to find an effective cure, discover the causes of the new virus and make a vaccine. Happily, at the end of 2020, the success of creating an effective vaccine was announced. A vaccine is a product that stimulates a person's immune system to produce immunity to a specific disease, thus protecting the person from that disease (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). Vaccination is the administration of agent-specific, but safe, antigenic components that in vaccinated individuals can induce protective immunity against the corresponding infectious agent (WHO 2, 2021).

As it had been predicted, multiple pharmaceutical companies attempted to develop an efficient cure and some eventually did. In the European Union, the decision of using some types of vaccines has to be approved by the (EMA) European Medicines Agency. In this context, public health and medical practitioners had to promote acceptance of these vaccines and this is not enough to be conducted by their official channels, but also by using mass media, which is well known as an important source of information on health issues. The world of information and news has enabled society to keep up with the evolution of the pandemic that is happening to us at the moment through the evolution of COVID-19 (Contreras, 2021). In addition, transparency in communication is a key principle of public health, especially during a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic (Hatcher, 2020). In cases like these, communication goes far beyond the simple transmission of information to the public (Pop-Flanja, 2020).

After the approval of the first vaccine to be used safely in the European Union countries, the vaccination campaign started. 27 December 2020 was the official date when this campaign began in Romania, similar to other European countries. This event, as others before it, attracted the attention of mass media, whether we are talking about national or local journals. The same happened in online local media in Cluj-Napoca, one of the biggest cities in Romania based on the number of population, but also one of the most important medical centres in the country.

It is well known that the media, in general, has been considered an important tool for communicating information about vaccines, raising awareness and motivating the public to make important decisions about

their healthcare (Catalan-Matamoros, Peñafiel-Saiz, 2019). Modern technologies also prompted traditional newspapers to disseminate their articles through online channels of information.

METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional design was used to conduct this study, based on a qualitative as well as a quantitative analysis. Data were collected over one month from 27 December 2020 to 27 January 2021 and four online newspapers from Cluj-Napoca were chosen to be analysed. These newspapers were selected because they have daily issues and a large number of readers, being available to the public online without being required to pay a subscription. In doing this research, each day of the selected period was verified in the newspapers' archives to find news regarding the vaccination campaign. It is important to mention that news about the virus or the number of new cases was left behind, because the focus was only on the way information is spread about the vaccination campaign.

The research question of this study was to find out the type of message the biggest online newspapers from Cluj-Napoca are distributing regarding the vaccination campaign.

The content of the article is organized around four sections: one for each online newspaper analysed, all of them being followed by general conclusions. Initially, a quantitative measurement of the number of specific articles for each newspaper was made, followed by the identification of the frequencies on the article's appearance. Then, each article was analysed by identifying whether it had a named author or it was assumed by the newspaper's editorial staff, and if the title was connected with the content. Also, we checked whether the sources of information were mentioned, i.e. if they were official institutions or other media agencies.

NEWSPAPER ANALYSIS - INFORMATION, SOURCES AND THEMES

In the online newspaper Monitorul de Cluj, we identified 108 articles on the subject of the vaccination campaign during the period studied. There was found no editorial. Fewer than 10 of them were signed/assumed

by the authors, the rest being assumed by the newspaper's editorial staff in general.

At the level of sources, the information contained in the articles came either from official sources, or from press agencies such as g4media.ro, Agerpres, Hotnews, Digi24, Mediafax, Libertatea and Sunday Telegraph.

The official sources mentioned in these articles were:

- The Ministry of Health - through official press releases or through the message of the Minister of Health;
- The Special Telecommunications Service (STS);
- The National Committee for the coordination of activities regarding anti-COVID vaccination - through official press releases or presenting the message of the coordinator of the vaccination campaign, Valeriu Gheorghiță;
- The Strategic Communication Group;
- Cluj Public Health Directorate;
- Cluj Prefecture, represented by the Prefect or Vice-Prefect;
- The National Agency for Medicines and Medical Devices of Romania;
- The European Medicines Agency;
- The Mayor of Cluj-Napoca, Emil Boc;
- Cluj Inspectorate for Emergency Situations;
- The Association of Romanian Municipalities;
- The Representative of family doctors from Cluj, Emiliană Costiug;
- The National Institute of Public Health;
- Cluj County School Inspectorate;
- Government Decision published in the Official Gazette;
- Personalities - Răzvan Cherecheș, Vlad Mixich, Alexandra Oană, commander of the Cluj Military Emergency Clinical Hospital, Dr. Doina Băltaru, Executive Director of PRIMER (Head of the Industrial Drug Manufacturers of Romania), Dragoș Damian, Anca Dana Buzoianu, primary pharmacist and Rector of UMF Cluj, Johan Neyts, head of the Rega-UCL Louvain Institute, Adrian Streinu-Cercel, Romanian researcher and member of the Academy of Medical Sciences, and Virgil Musta, head of the Infectious Diseases Department at the "Victor Babeș" Hospital in Timișoara.

In terms of frequency, it is important to mention that there were more than two articles a day related to this topic during the period under review, and sometimes there were even seven articles, except for the days of 31 December 2020 and 1-3 January 2021 when nothing was published.

The titles of the identified articles were always related to the information provided in their content. Even when other ideas than those specified in the title were included, the content offered details on what readers expected to know.

In terms of content, more than half of the identified articles were entirely about the topic mentioned in the title, namely the vaccination campaign. Therefore, some of the articles presented statements from the representatives of the competent institutions in order to send official pro-vaccination messages, such as those from the coordinator, Valeriu Gheorghiuță (National Committee for the coordination of activities on vaccination against COVID).

Most of the articles from the first month of the vaccination campaign in the online newspaper Monitorul de Cluj had an informative role. In most cases, information about the vaccine in general was provided, such as the number of doses available, the number of people already immunized, but also information about the platform and vaccination centres. There were also articles about personalities and their position on vaccination. As examples in this sense, we mention - *Simona Halep is vaccinated, When is President Iohannis getting vaccinated?, Pope Francis was vaccinated against Covid-19.*

In other cases, information on allergies was included, as well as about how the doses were stored, when vaccines from other manufacturers would be authorized, New Year's Eve and parties in a pandemic context, reopening of schools, explanations about what messenger RNA technology is, travel restrictions, the possibility to grant financial incentives to those who were vaccinated, restrictions for those who were not vaccinated, earnings of the medical staff involved in vaccination, or when Romania could reach its vaccination target.

The online publication Actual de Cluj presented 62 articles regarding the vaccination campaign, in the first month of its development. At least one article per day was published, except for 1 and 27 January 2021. There were days, such as 11 or 13 January 2021 when four articles were published

on this subject. All published materials were journalistic articles; no editorial was recorded.

The information contained in these articles often came from official sources or was taken from news agencies or other publications such as: g4media.ro, Agerpres, Hotnews, Digi24, Politico, news or Facebook. Regarding the official sources that formed the basis of this topic, we mention:

- The National Committee for the coordination of activities regarding anti-COVID vaccination - through official press releases or presenting the messages of the coordinator of the vaccination campaign, Valeriu Gheorghiuță;
- The Strategic Communication Group;
- The President of Cluj County Committee for Emergency Situations;
- Cluj Prefecture, represented by Prefect or Vice-Prefect;
- The mayor of Cluj-Napoca, Emil Boc;
- The Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy;
- The National Defence Ministry;
- The Ministry of Health;
- The Ministry of Education;
- Cluj Public Health Directorate;
- Cluj Emergency Situations Committee.

The titles of the articles analysed are in accordance with their content, even though sometimes they also contain other information, but which is also related to the subject of the vaccination campaign. All articles identified have an informative role and present a neutral position. However, it is important to note that only news with a positive impact is presented. Among the topics addressed in the articles from Actual de Cluj we mention: the first doctors vaccinated in Cluj-Napoca, the distribution of vaccine doses, appointments on the vaccination platform or vaccination of teachers.

Other topics covered in the articles were about who could be scheduled for the vaccine, how the vaccination centres would be funded, vaccination of people in detention centres, vaccination of university teaching staff across the country, the presentation of encouraging percentages on the number of those who wanted to be vaccinated or the

fact that Romania was in second place in the European Union in regarding the number of those vaccinated before 27 January 2021.

Between 27 December 2020 and 27 January 2021, the online newspaper *Făclia de Cluj* devoted a number of 20 articles to the vaccination campaign against COVID. The first reference was made on 6 January, but there were days when no news was published on this subject. (e.g. 7, 9 and 10 January). There were also days when the frequency of news was three per day (11, 15 and 17 January). Twelve (12) of twenty (20) articles were signed by the authors. No editorial was found.

The sources of information come from national, county or local authorities, press agencies or interviews / opinions of personalities from Cluj-Napoca. From these sources we mention:

- Press agency-Agerpres;
- The Ministry of Health - through an official communiqué or through the message of the Minister of Health;
- The Special Telecommunications Service (STS);
- The National Committee for the coordination of activities regarding anti-COVID vaccination - through official communiqués or by presenting the message of the coordinator of the vaccination campaign, Valeriu Gheorghită;
- The Strategic Communication Group;
- Cluj Public Health Directorate / director Mihai Moisesescu;
- Cluj Prefecture, represented by the Prefect or Vice-Prefect;
- The Romanian Academy of Sciences;
- Personalities: Romanian President Klaus Iohannis and diabetologist Nicolae Hâncu. Their message is pro-vaccination.

The titles of the articles reflect their content and are informative, pro-vaccination. These refer to the vaccine (number of vaccinated persons, number of doses distributed to the Cluj regional center), the vaccination platform (operation, vaccination stages / groups of people related to each stage, ways of scheduling vaccination, irregularities found regarding the operation of the platform / vaccination schedules) and the creation of new vaccination centers (simplification of the establishment and authorization procedure of vaccination centers against COVID-19, controls at new centers, measures for the recruitment and payment of staff involved in the vaccination process against COVID-19).

Ziua de Cluj newspaper allocated a number of 140 articles in the first month to the vaccination campaign against COVID-19. 28 articles were taken from the Mediafax or Agerpres news agencies, the rest being assumed either by their authors or by the newspaper's editorial staff. The average is almost 5 news a day.

Along with Agerpres and Mediafax, information from observatornews, g4media.ro, BBC.com, news.ro, Reuters, Alephnews and France Press Agency, international newspapers Sunday Telegraph and Daily Mail, national TV stations ProTV and DIGI 24 and international TV station BBC were also used.

To these were added:

- The European Medicines Agency;
- The European Commission;
- The World Health Organization;
- Cluj Military Emergency Hospital;
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
- The Ministry of Health - through an official communiqué or through the message of the Minister of Health/ State Secretary;
- The National Institute of Public Health;
- The Special Telecommunications Service (STS);
- The National Committee for the coordination of activities regarding anti-COVID vaccination - through official communiqués or by presenting the message of the coordinator of the vaccination campaign, Valeriu Gheorghita;
- The Strategic Communication Group;
- The Vaccinology Group of the National Society of Family Physicians;
- Cluj Prefecture, represented by the Prefect or Vice-Prefect;
- The Mayor of Cluj-Napoca/ Gherla/ Turda;
- Cluj Public Health Directorate;
- Opinions/interviews/posts on social networking - international/national and local personalities Simona Halep, Pope Francis, Klaus Iohannis, Anca Buzoianu - Rector of UMF, Queen Elizabeth II and her husband, Queen Margareta and Prince Radu, Raed Arafat, Members of the Romanian Government, and Recep Erdogan - President of Turkey.

The messages of the political, cultural, sports and academic personalities are pro-vaccination, proving the administration of the vaccine or declaring the intention to be vaccinated. However, there is also a message from His Eminence Teodosie I, an important Orthodox personality, against vaccination.

There are also headlines with a negative impact on the reader, but when you read the news you notice that there is no connection between the title and the content. Title: *A doctor had seizures and went to Intensive Care after being vaccinated against COVID-19.* Content: *Ministry officials said the doctor had a history of allergic reactions and said there was no evidence from clinical trials that anyone had developed an inflammation of the brain after the vaccine was given.*

The information of the population on the vaccination campaign is mainly focused on three pillars: vaccine, vaccination platform and vaccination centers. The news is recurrent and refers to the number of people vaccinated, adverse reactions to the vaccine and number of doses distributed to the Cluj regional center. Regarding the other aspects, the operation, the vaccination stages / groups of people related to each stage, ways of scheduling vaccination, irregularities regarding the operation of the platform / vaccination schedules, simplification of the authorization procedure and organization of the anti-COVID-19 vaccination centers, and a call for doctors and nurses from the COVID vaccination centers in Cluj were presented.

Complementary themes to the campaign inform the public about the differences between vaccines, online conferences about vaccines, worldwide / European statistics on vaccination, the existence of counterfeit vaccines on the market, the approval of new vaccines at European level, the possibility of developing a COVID-19 vaccine in Romania, solutions offered by Cluj-Napoca entrepreneurs for the transport of vaccines, information about vaccination in other states (Israel, United Kingdom, Sweden) and pandemic travel conditions.

CONCLUSIONS

The media, in general, is an extremely important instrument in offering and spreading information to the public. Consequently, the four online newspapers that we have analysed fit into this concept. Their

intention was to inform and disseminate the vaccination campaign against COVID-19 among their readers and they succeeded in this aspect. Their message was a positive, pro-vaccination one, although there was also presented some negative news –in terms of side-effects / victims after vaccination - taken from press agencies all over the world. We have to mention that there was no correlation between the title of such articles and their content.

The articles presented in the online papers referred in general to four aspects: the positive campaign developed by international/national/local personalities from the academic, political, economic, social, sports, and religious field; vaccine information; the platform for the vaccination campaign and the creation of local vaccination centers. Of course, other topics related to these were also presented.

The frequency of the articles depends on each newspaper. *Ziua de Cluj* is situated in first place, followed by *Monitorul de Cluj*, *Actual de Cluj* and *Făclia de Cluj*.

The newspapers turned to international/national/local authorities that are in charge of the management/leading/ coordination responsibilities of vaccination campaigns in order to properly inform the public.

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INTERINSTITUTIONAL COMMUNICATION – AN ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT OF ECONOMIC INTELLIGENCE SYSTEMS

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this work is to illustrate why, in order to be prompt, adaptive and agile, a national economic intelligence system requires an to be in place an efficient communication mechanism between intelligence services, the state administrative apparatus, the diplomatic apparatus and the private sector. The communication should rely on well-established procedures, processes and channels which facilitate data access clearances and makes it possible to timely deliver the required information to meet the goals by all beneficiaries.

Moreover, given the increasing importance of the economic area, the required correlation of intelligence community efforts and the need for coordination among all entities in the economic intelligence apparatus, the process of interinstitutional communication will be portrayed as a possible essential binder within the national economic intelligence system.

We will continue by showing why an efficient communication within the national economic intelligence system requires that the national security strategy should reflect the need for economic intelligence activities. Also, it will be pointed why, to facilitate an efficient communication, it is recommendable to promote the economic intelligence up to the rank of a genuine public policy and make use of the new technologies throughout the entire intelligence cycle.

Further, by reference to the phases of the intelligence cycle, we will reconfirm the idea that an efficient communication is a necessary condition for a successful conduct of all specific economic intelligence activities.

Keywords: economic intelligence; national economic intelligence system; entities; interinstitutional communication.

INTRODUCTION

The economic intelligence is that particular systemic and systematic process of intelligence and related (non-intelligence) entities which, by coordinated actions and specific means, collects, analyses, assesses, disseminates and ensures the management of economic, technological, financial, commercial and governmental information and knowledge, the acquirement of which helps directly or indirectly, by keeping decision makers informed, to sustainably grow productivity, strengthen the competitive position of the national economy and the state security.

Providing insights and an understanding of the economic environment, anticipating its trends, and detecting (potential or actual) economic threats, economic intelligence aims to ensure economic security, resilience, sustainability and bring added value. Hence economic intelligence provides decision makers with information needed to identify what actions are required to ensure the state's economic security and support its regional or global economic ambitions (Fernandez, 2013, pp. 51-54). To achieved this, various information is collected regarding (state and private) economic actors and their economic policies, the legal and regulatory systems of different states, finance and specific tax frameworks of some national economies, access to markets and resources, labour, production, trade and exchange agreements and other aspects of the national and international economic system. The collection process equally involves numerous state actors along with private actors. This mix of topics and entities forms a highly volatile complex anisotropic system (DCI, USA, 1995, pp. 11-22) (Cullen & Reichborn-Kjen, 2017, pp. 8-10).

The national economic intelligence system includes all government and non-government entities which, by coordinated efforts relying on effective processes and efficient communication, aim to detect and anticipate all opportunities pertaining to, and all threats against, the national economy and critical economic entities, in order to provide the decision makers with actionable information to support their strategic decisions and potential countermeasures plans (McDowell, 2009, pp. 50-59). The economic intelligence system comprises entities that are part of intelligence services, the state administrative apparatus, the diplomatic apparatus and the private sector. The intelligence services assume the central role and manage, collect, process, analyse, disseminate and store information (Arenas, 2013, pp. 21-25).

The economic intelligence operates in a heterogeneous, complex, and volatile environment, which is often subject to economic conflicts. Therefore, referring mainly to early warning activities, the economic information system must be agile (able to respond to any challenge), adaptable (can be extended or restricted as needed) and prompt (respond quickly, respond immediately to threats or quickly seize opportunities) (Pettee, 1947, pp. 1-5).

In this article, starting from the fact that an economic intelligence system needs to quickly react and considering that such system includes specific entities such as intelligence services, the state apparatus, the diplomatic apparatus and private entities from the business environment, we will show why it is required that an efficient communication exist among these categories of entities, relying on well-established communication procedures, processes and channels that ensure the timely delivery of information required for achieving the goals of the designated recipients.

As such, relying on a review of specialised literature, thematic analysis and comparative analysis, this work aims (i) to show why the interinstitutional communication is a necessary ingredient for an efficient economic intelligence system, (ii) to identify how we can ensure a proper communication, and (iii) to determine what phases of the intelligence cycle depend on the existence of proper communication processes.

WHY IS COMMUNICATION A NECESSARY INGREDIENT FOR AN EFFICIENT NATIONAL ECONOMIC INTELLIGENCE SYSTEM?

The end of the Cold War caused the speeding up of globalisation, the opening of new markets and the strengthening of free trade practices. These factors and technological breakthroughs resulted in an increased importance of the economic area in ensuring state security¹¹ and, implicitly, in an increased importance of economic intelligence within the national intelligence ecosystems.

¹¹ The importance of the economic area is first supported by the major impact that the economic imbalances can cause on state security. Moreover, an efficient and effective economic intelligence system, with a well-established collection base, is needed due to the volatility, dynamics and extremely frequent changes occurring in the economic sector.

As such, Michael Herman notes that the collected information should provide sufficient decision-making basis “in order to ensure efficiency, economy and prompt adaptation to changing requirements” (Herman, 1996, p. 27), as collection provides information on foreign economies, international trade and finance. The same idea is supported by Eduardo Olier Arenas in his work “Strategic intelligence and economic security”, in which the author regards the society of the 1990s as “interconnected” and “globalised”. In this geo-economic context, the (economic) intelligence is an essential information basis for beneficiaries in the decision-making process: “the economic intelligence is essential [...] in the current geo-economic context” (Arenas, 2013, pp. 13-14) because it substantiates medium and long-term strategies¹² (Arenas, 2013, p. 24), and provides the operational and tactical layers with structured information on possible threats.¹³ The collection base is broad, complex, and an efficient collection requires proper interinstitutional coordination. The same is also needed in order to respond to possible threats. Uncorrelated actions and fragmented communication could lead to inefficient economic intelligence systems. For example, in his work “The role of strategic intelligence in the modern world”, the author Antonio M. Díaz Fernández explains the failure of the Spanish economic intelligence system, pointing out to the desynchronization existing among the diplomatic apparatus, intelligence services and the administrative apparatus. He also mentioned that the economic intelligence systems of France, USA, Japan, China, Sweden and Germany were more efficient because they had already defined such cooperation procedures and flows (Fernandez, 2013, pp. 49-56). The same idea is also supported by Sean Gregory in his work “Economic Intelligence in the Post-Cold War Era”, in which the author, analysing the economic intelligence systems of USA, Russia, France and Japan, regards the proper interinstitutional communication, cooperation and correlation as an essential condition for

¹² The strategic decisions are substantiated based on: (1) complex economic analyses and forecasts which take the political and geostrategic circumstances into account, (2) knowing the legal and regulatory aspects in detail, (3) assessment of foreign policy interests and international relations that could condition the economic behaviours, and (4) making predictive assessments of possible threats and risks to timely establish the security requirements related to countermeasures.

¹³ That is, those threats with short or medium-term impact, threats generated by competitors, trends and disruptive factors, technologies, (sales, merchandise and financial) markets, etc.

an efficient economic intelligence system (Gregory, 1997, pp. 9-15). The same aspects referring to the need that a proper cooperation should exist between intelligence ÷ diplomacy ÷ administration and companies in order to secure the efficiency of economic intelligence system are also mentioned by Evan H Potter in the work "Economic Intelligence & National Security" (Potter, 1998, p. 161) or Patrick De Souza in "Economic Strategy and National Security" (DeSouza, 2000, pp. 5-9). The last two authors also underline, just like Michael Herman, the particular role played by the diplomatic apparatus in the collection of economic intelligence and the supply of tactical and operational support to companies.

As regards the need of ensuring proper communication and coordinated efforts within the intelligence community, as far back as the late 1990s, Hermann was emphasising that the volatility and asymmetries of the new economic environment led the states to continuously develop intelligence systems. In this context, the economic intelligence system needed to be integrated within intelligence services and an efficient communication was necessary among intelligence structures, so as to allow the correlation of intelligence community efforts which could ensure both a broad collection base, which is specific to economic intelligence, and offensive and defensive roles. There is an interdependence between the offensive roles and the defensive ones. "States wanting high defensive security standards require offensive collection capable of giving sophisticated advice" (Herman, 1996, pp. 181, 343).

Therefore, in order to have an efficient economic intelligence system, all local, regional and global economic realities should be considered in a systematic and structured manner, as they are connected to all categories of actors and engaged in the national economic intelligence system. This is why a continuous communication and correlation should exist between the actions carried out internally and those carried out abroad (by all categories of actors involved), the two plans influencing one another (Josua S. Goldstein, 2014, pp. 143-147). Hence the need for a proper communication and correlation of efforts within the intelligence community (between domestic and foreign entities) as well as for an efficient communication and a correlation of efforts between public structures (domestic and foreign public administration), private structures (companies carrying out domestic and worldwide economic activities), diplomatic structures (including the chambers of commerce) and intelligence services. Certainly,

the diplomatic apparatus plays a central part when it comes to establishing commercial agreements and the adhesion to various interstate organisations.

As such, in this context (1) of significant growth of the economic dimension up to the point of becoming a critical dimension, (2) of the correlation of efforts within the intelligence community, which is required for a broad collection base, specific to economic intelligence, and (3) of the need to correlate the efforts of the administrative apparatus, business environment, the diplomatic apparatus and intelligence services, in order to have an efficient economic intelligence apparatus, we can describe the interinstitutional communication process as the essential binder within the national economic intelligence system.

HOW TO ENSURE PROPER COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC INTELLIGENCE SYSTEM

The economic intelligence – a central objective within the national security strategy

Thus, the current macroeconomic environment and technological advances require the simultaneous use of economic intelligence domestic and external resources. In addition to the use of information collected through the specific channels of domestic and external intelligence services, the collection process implies accessing national and global databases (Potter, 1998, pp. 45). For example, the economic intelligence users acting inside the state can simultaneously access both internally generated data flows and analyses (e.g., analyses drawn up by the research departments of certain local universities, etc.), and externally collected data and information (e.g., analyses of foreign universities and research institutes) (Potter, 1998, pp. 50-51). In this context, Patrick DeSouza discusses the need of ensuring economic security from a strategic standpoint, mentioning that it is essential to have an integrated vision, as reflected in the national macro-strategy, regarding economic strategy and national economic security, because there is

“[...] the need for a strategic approach to foreign economic policy; the new instabilities produced by financial volatility, trade friction, and grinding poverty; the changing concept

of security; the need to integrate domestic and international approaches to common concerns; and the **problem of communicating such integration [...]**" (DeSouza, 2000, pp. 2-5).

Hence, a **national macro-strategy reflecting the need to ensure an efficient economic intelligence activity** makes it possible to take all steps required to ensure communication (partly solves "the problem of communicating such integration") and to correlate the efforts within the intelligence community and the efforts between various categories of intelligence and non-intelligence entities making up the national economic intelligence system.

Economic intelligence – a genuine public policy

The same idea relating to the macro-strategic importance of economic intelligence is also asserted by Bernard Carayon. The author notes that the efficiency of the economic intelligence system is dependent on its cohesion and advocates, to this end, emphasising that the economic intelligence relies on a good **social cohesion**. As such, in the field of economic intelligence the responsibilities are equally incumbent on (i) the states and administrative territorial units (both the public sector and the private one), (ii) businesses and (iii) citizens. It follows that economic intelligence should become "a genuine public policy" (Carayon, 2003, p. 13).

Thus, Carayon promotes the idea that, similarly to other public policies such as tax and environmental policies, economic intelligence must become a public policy of the state. As an argument, he mentions that the economic intelligence ensures a large part of the specific information base that is required for drafting and implementing state's macro-strategy. In the implementation phase, an efficient economic approach relies on the coordination and mutual support of all entities involved. The efficiency of such an approach is directly proportional to the level of cooperation among these entities, and the author considers this evolution up to a point where social cohesion is achieved. **Social cohesion** is one of the factors that facilitate the fast transmission of information between the actors involved: intelligence services, the administrative apparatus, the diplomatic apparatus and economic entities, thereby increasing the efficiency of the approach.

New technologies facilitate the communication within the economic intelligence systems

At the end of the Cold War priorities changed. With the victory of capitalist system, economic affairs started to prevail over the political and military ones. Therefore, the paradigm of the struggle for power shifted from the political and military side to the economic one. As soon as multinational corporations started to expand in the 1990s, despite the presence of various international economic cooperation and regulatory institutions, the progressive deregulation of financial markets and the dissemination of information via the Internet made the international economic system and its information flows more dynamic and, at the same time, uncertain. This state of facts significantly contributed to the escalation of economic competition and the accelerated development of specific intelligence systems (Pasquazzi, 2017, p. 4). Likewise, due to the uncertainties of fiscal markets and the volatility of the economic environment, it is more and more unclear what the threats are and what information needs to be actually protected. Moreover, intelligence services increasingly use technical means to collect information. And since economic security is already a priority on the strategic agenda of states, intelligence services play an increasing part in ensuring the security of companies involved in classified government agreements.

At the same time, there is a constant growth in the degree of intelligence services' involvement in protecting key companies from strategic sectors against foreign interference, by providing necessary support to protect industrial secrets and assistance in keeping some critical business aspects confidential. Moreover, in the context of globalisation and regionalisation, ensuring economic security becomes one of the main aims of intelligence services. The economic security element in the national security policy also extends to defending overseas assets, protecting personnel and assets abroad and reacting to threats and conflicts that occur between foreign (state or private) actors and can generate threats to overseas assets. There are many examples in this sense: the support granted by the CIA in the 1990s to United Fruit Company in order to enhance its operations in Guatemala (Gregory, 1997, p. 5) or the support granted in the 2000s by MI6 to the BP company in Iran¹⁴ (Hatton-Proulx, 2019). The

¹⁴ In 2015 BP announced the appointment of John Sawers, former MI6 head, as non-executive member of the board of directors.

measures taken to protect these assets become complementary to foreign policy elements in support of national interests, including economic ones. Thus, **the intelligence support granted for international trade and the protection of overseas investments is an important item on the agenda of intelligence services** (Herman, 1996, pp. 343-344) (Potter, 1998, p. 56).

In this context, for a proper communication to exist **between protected economic entities** (public, with mixed public-private shareholding, public private partnerships or just private) **and intelligence services, well-established (technological) systems, procedures, processes, and channels are required.** Such means will allow both parties to quickly react, rapidly counteract the threats and prevent all potential risks from materialising. Currently, **thanks to the new technologies**, it is possible to implement efficient communication flows and procedures in real time, between various groups of entities, while meeting the restrictions imposed by information classification criteria (Miller, 2015, pp. 38-41).

Moreover, states wanting high (defensive) security standards require an (offensive) collection capable of providing increasingly sophisticated information and recommendations (Herman, 1996, p. 181). The governments and decision makers must be informed of the actions and intents of an increasing number of state, non-state, political and economic actors, which possess more and more action methods and tools, leading thereby to multiple threats in various areas. **The new technologies** are intended to meet all these needs, supporting the specific activities of the **intelligence cycle phases**, especially as regards the collection¹⁵, processing, analysis, management and dissemination of information. For example, in 2008, DNI Open Source Center (OSC) was collecting economic information from more than 2,000 periodicals, 300 radio stations, 235 television stations, 95 foreign organisations (e.g., *The Economist*, Thomson Reuters, Lexis-Nexis, Stratfor, etc), and other sources from more than 160 countries, with information in more than 80 languages, from websites, mass media, shows, television, radio, maps, databases, grey literature, photographs and images from commercial satellites (Bean, 2011, pp. 3-5).

¹⁵ The technological collection of information can be done from both open sources and use of specific cyber espionage methods.

THE INTELLIGENCE CYCLE AND THE NEED FOR AN EFFICIENT COMMUNICATION

Requirements – the intelligence topic

By reference to the **requirement (or the intelligence topic)**, the intelligence community can process three types of requirements: (i) “purely” economic, which mainly deal with economic matters, (ii) “correlated” to economic intelligence – or mixed – which deal with (as an example) subject matters related to terrorism funding,¹⁶ military¹⁷ or of other nature, and (iii) unrelated to the economic ones – non-economic.¹⁸

Given the interchangeable, complex and integrated particularities of intelligence practice, the above-mentioned classifications are useful and required from a theoretical and doctrinal standpoint, but the process is actually a continuous whole, hence requiring an efficient communication.

Collection – planning and directing the collection – intelligence sources system

Moving on to the next phase of the intelligence cycle, i.e. the collection – planning and directing the collection along with the system of sources and collection processes, maintaining the rationale relied upon in the classification of requirements, the sources can be divided in three categories: economic, mixed and non-economic. As such, a specific economic intelligence requirement can access economic, mixed and, exceptionally, non-economic sources. This means that other intelligence structures can also be involved in solving an economic intelligence requirement. As a result, a proper cooperation is necessary both among intelligence structures and between intelligence structures – the administrative apparatus – diplomacy – and – economic entities.

Moreover, one should bear in mind that in peacetime, information is a critical resource for international competition. Particularly when it comes to international economic, financial and commercial matters, when analysing

¹⁶ For example, aiming at dismantling economic networks which support terrorist networks or cells.

¹⁷ For example, aiming at military production facilities and economic resources of an opponent state.

¹⁸ An example in this respect is a military operation targeting the location of enemy troops in a theatre of operations.

the information, **all sources should be assessed**, for a broad range of subject matters and territories. The covert collection will continue to provide, as one-source inputs, economic, tactical and clandestine information. However, in the case of strategic-level economic forecasting reports, the analysis relies on **multiple databases**, interpreting large volumes of data (Potter 1998, pp 22-31). As such, the specific analytical approach of economic intelligence requires **the assessment of large volumes of data**, coming from multiple databases and their integration with the other types of information (official information and information collected from other types of sources) (Herman 1996, pp. 352-353).

Furthermore, considering the complexity of the economic area and the interdependences between the economic, political, legal and regulatory elements, mass media, diplomatic matters, etc., **the specific economic intelligence collection base** must cover all these critical areas. The challenge raised by economic intelligence consists in the ability to convert large volumes of data, which in most cases are unorganised, come from multiple sources, are available in different forms and are collected through several categories of channels, into primary data, intelligence, verified intelligence, actionable intelligence and subsequently into knowledge. The specific methods and instruments of economic intelligence can assist in the creation, validation and enhancement of a collection base adjusted to intelligence needs. It is an essential step considering the large number of sources, of different types,¹⁹ coming from various key areas,²⁰ with anisotropic topics²¹ (iDeTra, 2002, pp. 17, 18, 26, 27).

However, since numerous sources are accessed (the collection base is broad) and such sources differ in terms of both types and nature of information, for an efficient collection and proper management (coverage) of the collection base, the intelligence community (several intelligence services) and all categories of entities within the national economic intelligence system should be involved. Another challenge with regard to the need for proper communication and coordination within the national intelligence system is the required dynamic calibration of the collection

¹⁹ They could include various databases, such as government and private ones, which can be structured or unstructured. They can also include studies, prospects, publications, etc.

²⁰ Areas of expertise, such as economy, diplomacy, the state administrative apparatus, are considered, etc.

²¹ For example: processes, products, regulations, competitors, mergers, partnerships, sectoral information, social trends, etc.

base. The **dynamic calibration of the collection base** is a process in which the sources are continuously reviewed because the environment is anisotropic and volatile. This proves once again that a proper communication should exist within the intelligence community and between the intelligence community and the other actors of the national economic intelligence system. Certainly, in order to protect classified information and the sources, the communication processes, procedures, channels and protocols must be clearly defined.

Processing intelligence

With regards to the processing of information, given that several intelligence structures are likely to be involved in the collection of information, the processing stage is critical from two points of view: the selection of relevant information (coming from several sources) for the current requirement and the classification of all information collected so that it can be easily accessed thereafter – certainly, meeting all clearance requirements regarding classified information access.

A proper information mapping (a proper structuring of meta-data and attributes assigned to data and information) enables all services to efficiently use the already collected information when new requirements arise, sometimes without being required to access the sources to collect new information. Moreover, proper classification and indexing of information are required so that it can be accessed whenever necessary by the intelligence community.²² An easy access to information and proper communication are essential at this stage too.

Intelligence Analysis

Intelligence analysis must consider all sources (all sources analysis). The collected information must be gathered in a unique database wherefrom, according to the access rights and based on the assigned attributes and meta-data, it should be able to be accessed by processors and analysts.²³ Referring to the national economic intelligence system, the

²² It is preferable that a brigade or a specific intelligence service, such as the Counter-Terrorist Brigade, be able to access intelligence collected from the sources of another intelligence service, such as the Foreign Intelligence Service – Operative Brigade.

²³ Unless a service exploits the information collected by another intelligence service, in most cases, the processing and analysis are carried out by the same entity.

analysis is carried out by designated analysts specialising in economic intelligence analysis. There are however specific cases where it can be required to convene analysis committees, as the analysed situations can be complex and interdisciplinary. Moreover, given that it is necessary to **analyse all sources** and to embed in the analytical approach types of information other than those coming from diplomatic and intelligence services, such as databases from multiple sources, including the private ones, and information collected from types of sources²⁴ other than those that are specific to intelligence, communication within the intelligence community proves to be essential for ensuring the efficiency of specific economic intelligence approaches. The information diversity requires that the entire intelligence community should be able to access the unique expertise, perhaps owned by a single intelligence service.

Creation of deliverables, intelligence dissemination and feedback collection

With regard to **deliverables creation and intelligence dissemination**, considering that most economic requirements involve multidisciplinary areas, there can be many cases where even though the requirement belonged to only one beneficiary, the distribution list includes several entities which can be influenced/ affected by the topic. In this context, several deliverables can be created and tailored for each entity (the initial beneficiary and the subsequently added ones), in keeping with the communication pattern and each beneficiary's specific level of access to the classified information. **The dissemination** will be made using the specific agreed upon communication channels of each entity included in the distribution list. The opinions of the beneficiaries are subsequently collected (feedback) and if additional inquiries or other information requirements arise, the intelligence cycle will be restarted.

Once the intelligence products (strategic analysis, case analysis, report, informative note, etc.) are created, they will be stored for further access in compliance with principles that are similar to those applying to primary information. Certainly, specific classifications, attributes, indexing and meta-data pertaining to such information and type of report will be added. Given that there are many common areas in which intelligence services can

²⁴ For example: databases and reports issued by consulting companies, research institutes, etc.

mutually enhance their activity (a single source can provide information of both military and economic nature and/or an economic report can also stop terrorism financing activities), we conclude that efficient communication is also absolutely necessary for the proper operation of the national economic intelligence system (which is an area of the national intelligence system, mention being made that there are different areas which mainly serve economic purposes – e.g. sources acting on the capital markets or chambers of commerce).

In conclusion, the presentation of intelligence cycle phases shows once again that an efficient communication among the 4 groups of entities – intelligence services, administrative and government apparatus, diplomatic apparatus and private entities – is a necessary condition of the entire process. Furthermore, economic intelligence systems also **use new technologies** in relation to both **set out and communication of intelligence requirements** and the **facilitation of efficient collection, processing, analysis** (of all sources) and **dissemination** of information among the 4 groups of entities: intelligence services, the administrative and government apparatus, the diplomatic apparatus and private entities.

CONCLUSIONS

The national economic intelligence system should be agile, adaptive and prompt because (i) it operates in a heterogeneous, complex and volatile environment, and (ii) comprises specific entities belonging to intelligence services, the state administrative apparatus, the diplomatic apparatus and the private sector. As such, an efficient communication should exist between these entities, relying on well-established communication procedures, processes and channels, which promote (1) adhesion to information classification rules and also make it possible (2) to timely deliver the information required to achieve the goals to all recipients.

Due to the expansion of globalisation, the constant opening of new markets, the strengthening of specific free trade practices and accelerated technological advances, the economic dimension became more important within the defence of state security. As such, considering (1) the significant growth of the economic dimension up to the point of becoming a critical dimension, (2) the need for correlated efforts within the intelligence community, required to ensure a broad collection base, and (3) the need to

correlate the efforts of the administrative apparatus, the business environment, the diplomatic apparatus and intelligence services, in order to have an efficient economic intelligence apparatus, we can consider the interinstitutional communication process as the essential binder within the national economic intelligence system.

A proper communication within the national economic intelligence system can be ensured by: (1) a national macro-strategy reflecting the need of ensuring efficient economic intelligence activities, so as to have the framework required to initiate all necessary measures in order to ensure the communication between all entities that are part of the national economic intelligence system, (2) promoting economic intelligence up to the rank of a genuine public policy, because the efficiency of the economic intelligence system depends on its cohesion and social cohesion, subordinated to a public policy, is one of the factors that facilitate the fast transmission of information between the actors involved, and (3) making use of the new technologies, throughout the entire intelligence cycle, hence facilitating the implementation of efficient communication flows and procedures, between various groups of entities, while also complying with all restrictions imposed by information classification criteria, so as to enable the national economic intelligence system to quickly react, counteract threats fast and prevent the potential risks from materialising.

Likewise, the presentation of the intelligence cycle phases reconfirms the idea that an efficient communication among the 4 groups of entities – intelligence services, the administrative and government apparatus, the diplomatic apparatus and private entities – is a necessary condition for the successful performance of all specific economic intelligence activities.

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MONETARY POLICY TRANSMISSION VIA THE EXPECTATIONS CHANNEL: THE EUROPEAN CENTRAL BANK AND MONETARY DECISIONS COMMUNICATION IN TIMES OF COVID

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ABSTRACT: This article is focused on the European Central Bank's use of the expectations monetary policy transmission channel during the COVID-19 pandemic by employing a systematic and structured communication and signaling approach meant to boost the effectiveness and efficiency of other, very powerful, monetary policy instruments. In this context, we argue that the complementary character of timely and coherent monetary policy communication techniques has improved the outcome delivered by the full set of monetary policies employed and has been instrumental in achieving broader policy objectives.

Keywords: monetary policy; expectations channel; European Central Bank; policy communication.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 triggered economic crisis is not only acute, leading to a rapid rise in public debt levels around the world as governments have scrambled to provide with fiscal relief packages of unprecedented size and scope, but its emergence was surprising, its initial impact very severe, while the high degree of unknown has significantly complicated policy response. Unlike past global crises, which were triggered mainly by economic factors (perhaps with the exceptions of those prompted by the world wars), this time it was a major healthcare crisis that sent what was, by many measures, a healthy and solid economic environment, spiraling down. This has stretched the response capacity of institutions across the board, from those making up the first line medical system to the political

establishment and the financial world. In this context, it is the purpose of this article to focus on the crucial response of the European Central Bank (ECB), which has stepped up to the challenge and has made swift monetary policy decisions involving its entire arsenal of monetary policy instruments, resulting in the provision of increased levels of liquidity that have managed to keep interest rates at extremely low levels, despite the deteriorating fiscal positions of governments and the stretched out balance sheets of private companies and, thus, not only keeping the economy afloat, but successfully financing the rapidly increasing debt generated by the COVID-19 crisis.

MONETARY POLICY TRANSMISSION AND THE ROLE OF CENTRAL BANK COMMUNICATION

As mentioned, both the ECB and the Fed have made use of their wide range of monetary policy instruments, with the most evident (and clearly decisive) impact being constituted by the European Central Bank's 1,850 billion EUR pandemic emergency purchase programme (PEPP), which aims (and seems to be succeeding) to “lower borrowing costs and increase lending in the euro area”²⁵ (ECB), with the Fed successfully employing similar asset purchase strategies, doubled by the steep decrease of the range for the federal funds rate to near zero.

These policies produced important effects via three out of the five monetary policy transmission channels identified by Loayza and Schmidt-Hebbel (2002). Namely, these main transmission channels in the pandemic response monetary policy context are²⁶:

- (1) the asset price channel, operating via two main routes. One of those routes has as its center market the capitalization of companies (compared to their replacement cost of assets) and their capacity to

²⁵ ECB as communicated via its website,

<https://www.ecb.europa.eu/home/search/coronavirus/html/index.en.html>

²⁶ For a more detailed description of how monetary transmission channels fundamentally operate, see: Dan, Horațiu (2013) *The Asset Price Channel and its Role in Monetary Policy Transmission*, The Annals of the University of Oradea. Economic Sciences, Nr. 1 / 2013. Dan, Horațiu (2013) “The Credit Channel and its Functions in Transmitting Monetary Policy Decisions”, *International Journal of Advances in Management and Economics*, No. 6 Vol. 2. Dan Horațiu Sorin (2014) *Influența mecanismului de transmisie asupra politicii monetare*, Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca.

raise capital and drive investments, a mechanism widely observed by economists after its initial description by Kaldor (1966) and Tobin (1969). The second route is centered around corporate and personal wealth and its effect on consumption, as monetary policy affects wealth (Mishkin, 1995). These monetary induced effects on the strongly interconnected elements (like inflation and its effects on securities or real estate, financial market conditions) make up an important part of the economic ecosystem and have constituted a most potent channel of monetary policy transmission during the pandemic, ensuring that the low interest rate/high liquidity environment that was (and still is, at the moment of writing this article) so vigorously pushed by both the ECB and the Fed is enabling the private sector to maintain certain levels of investment and consumption.

- (2) the credit channel, with its two main components, as described in Bernanke, and Gertler (1995) and Mishkin (1996): bank lending and balance sheet. In the case of the former, the central position is occupied by banks as an indispensable link in ensuring liquidity flows to the economy especially for smaller companies, which were especially sensitive to the COVID induced economic contraction as described in Bartik et al. (2020), with SMEs being a category susceptible to difficulties in obtaining (mainly from banks) the working capital required to stay afloat (McGeever, McQuinn and Myers, 2020). Referring to the balance sheet component of the credit transmission channel, the expansionary policies pursued by both the ECB and the Fed have positively impacted balance sheet valuations and thus contributed to easier access to financing.
- (3) the interest rate channel, which is based on findings such as those of Jorgenson (1963) showing that there is an inverse relation between (long term) interest rate levels and investments, coupled by the term structure of the interest rates, i.e., the strength of the connection between the short term interest rate (effectively set by central banks) and the long term ones²⁷. As Labonte (2021) notices in a report prepared as part of the body of research of the United States

²⁷ Analyzing the term “structure of the interest rates” has been a longstanding preoccupation among economists, with Schiller, Campbell and Schoenholtz (1983), Cox, Ingersoll and Ross (1985) or Constantinides (1992) among main theoretical researches on the topic.

Congressional Research Service, the impact of interest rate reductions was relatively limited because interest rates were already relatively low before the Covid crisis struck.

However, the use of monetary policy instruments that produce effects along these channels is subject to a significant increase in efficiency when used together with another set of instruments centered around the Central Bank's communication efforts and the trust that is established between itself and a wide range of economic entities. These communication and signaling activities are of great importance in changing perception and subsequently the behavior of economic agents and are transmitted via a separate monetary policy transmission channel that provides decisive support and acts as a catalyst to policy objective achievement: the expectations channel. As Beyer et al. (2017: 17) note, this monetary policy transmission channel is used by the central bank to "guide economic agents' expectations of future inflation and thus influence price developments by signaling the future course of monetary policy", as important decisions like investment and durable consumption have significant effects on employment, production and price-setting (Beyer et al., 2017: 17). As Jarociński and Karadi (2020: 1) observe, "central bank announcements simultaneously convey information about monetary policy and the central bank's assessment of the economic outlook", while reporting on visible effects of central bank announcements on interest rates and stock prices.

EUROPEAN CENTRAL BANK COMMUNICATION AND SIGNALING IN TIMES OF COVID

The expectations transmission channel is especially important in times like those that the world economies are currently facing. As noticed by Schnabel (2020),

"When policy space is limited, expectations become the main driver of monetary policy transmission in New Keynesian models. The idea of central banks providing forward guidance is largely built on this proposition".

The macroeconomic environment existing at the start of the pandemic driven economic turmoil and present throughout its development (that is

still underway when writing this article) is exactly one of limited policy space, the ECB set benchmark refinancing rate well in negative territory (-0.5% since September 2019 and continuously below zero since June 2014, after being zero for the previous 23 months), coupled with lax minimum reserve conditions.

The ECB has also designed a special and comprehensive section on its website dedicated to explaining all the instruments, measures and their objectives that characterize its monetary response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as it pursues to "mitigate the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the euro area economy and to support all European citizens" (ECB, 2020).

The solid engagement undertaken by the ECB is perhaps best highlighted by the words of the bank's president Christine Lagarde (2020), transmitted via Twitter on the 18th of March 2020, during the most critical and uncertainty-filled moments of the pandemic: "Extraordinary times require extraordinary action. There are no limits to our commitment to the euro. We are determined to use the full potential of our tools, within our mandate." Even though such a statement may look pompous in some political contexts, the ECB's stance to communication is regarded as an effort to build and maintain long term trust between the institution and broad players operating within the Eurozone economy (ranging from financial market participants to businesses and consumers) and the completely unequivocal tone has not only worked as an instrument meant to calm markets, but strongly contributed to a reversal of sentiment. This reversal is highly visible when examining stock market dynamics captured by the price evolution of the representative MSCI Europe index (Figure 1), as the ECB's commitment to the *whatever it takes* strategy proved to be a real game-changer and that both structural elements of such a commitment, *i.e.*, the verbal communication and the subsequent actual measures taken, most importantly the Pandemic Emergency Purchase Programme (PEPP) initially worth 750 billion Euros under which the ECB started purchasing private and public sector securities in order to provide with lifeline liquidities started on March 26th, 2020.

MONETARY POLICY TRANSMISSION VIA THE EXPECTATIONS CHANNEL: THE EUROPEAN CENTRAL BANK AND MONETARY DECISIONS COMMUNICATION IN TIMES OF COVID



Figure 1: MSCI Europe Index evolution
Source: plotted in www.investopedia.com

Regarding the bond market in the Eurozone, the yield analysis of Italian and French 10-year government bonds (as Italy and France are the biggest sovereign bond markets in the EU) shows similar patterns, as depicted in Figures 2 and 3.



Figure 2: Italian (above) and French (below) 10 year sovereign bond yield

Source: plotted on www.investopedia.com

Since its launch in March 2020, PEPP has been upgraded several times, with additional funding being added in June 4th 2020 (600 billion EUR) and December 10th 2020 (500 billion EUR), reaching a total of 1850 billion EUR, being labeled by ECB Executive Board member Isabel Schnabel (2020) as being “at the heart of our policy response [... acting] as an important circuit breaker that stopped the pandemic from turning into a full-blown financial crisis”. These moves to add considerable extra liquidity need to be seen as part of a broader picture describing multiple ECB monetary actions using multiple instruments, communication strategies, and the effects that

monetary policy signaling has induced via the expectations transmission channel being a constant presence. Even more, one can view the substantial monetary policy measures linked to asset purchases and yield management as a confirmation of the signaled “whatever it takes” monetary policy stance, showing that market participants can trust ECB signals and thus strengthening the effects of the ECB communications by significantly increasing the quality of market predictions.

Similar approaches to communication and the use of the expectations channel have been adopted by other major central banks, most notably the U.S. Federal Reserve Bank, which constantly communicates and signals its view on the economy and the outlook of future monetary policy decisions. The Fed's commitment (one that has transpired through numerous statements of Jerome Powell, the Chair of the Federal Reserve and other key Fed officials) to providing significant monetary support to a battered economy is efficiently summarized by The Federal Reserve's January 2021 press release:

“The Federal Reserve is committed to using its full range of tools to support the U.S. economy in this challenging time, thereby promoting its maximum employment and price stability goals.”

To this end, the Federal Reserve (2021) has set longer-term inflation anchored at 2% (with some flexibility around this level for a shorter time perspective) and re-iterated by a series of communications in the first months of 2021, like that of Chairman Powell, as reported by Reuters (2021).

CONCLUSIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic constituted an unexpected external factor to monetary policy outcomes, exerting acute pressure on how the world economic environment works and, consequently, facing monetary policymakers with an almost unprecedented need of delivering rapid and strong monetary relief. In this context, with central banks using their full arsenal of monetary policy tools, effective and efficient employment of the expectations transmission channel via a systematic and structured

communication and signaling approach has become even more so instrumental to monetary policy success. This article provided an overview of the European Central Bank's approach to communication since the inception of the pandemic, arguing that the decisive and well-timed character of the institution's use of the expectations monetary policy transmission channel (employed to coherently signal the commitment to the "whatever it take" stance and foreshadow the introduction of powerful tools (such as the unprecedented 1,850 billion EUR Pandemic Emergency Purchase Programme) has boosted the positive effects of other policies. These concerted policy actions have been pivotal in calming equity and debt markets and allowing governments to engage in large scale fiscal expansion while keeping borrowing costs at record low levels, with the ultimate function of supporting COVID ravaged economies, providing lifelines to strained sectors and limiting the decline in economic growth.

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BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY'S CRISIS MANAGEMENT DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT: The health crisis brought in Romania by the new coronavirus has affected life of each and every member of society. It has now become a social, and even economic crisis. In the context of increasing number of COVID-19 cases, one year past the beginning of this pandemic in Romania, we are to analyse how Babeș-Bolyai University has managed to counteract the effect of the pandemic on academic life and what were the most important decisions and measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 within the university. Babeș-Bolyai University from Cluj-Napoca was selected because it is one of the biggest universities in Romania, and the year 2020 was a year full a changes and challenges for its management team.

Keywords: pandemic; crisis management; Babeș-Bolyai University, COVID-19.

INTRODUCTION

On March 10th, 2020, in the context of the increasing number of cases of COVID-19, Babeș-Bolyai University (BBU) decided to announce the cancelation of face-to-face didactic activities as a measure of prevention. The decision was made in order to protect the students and staff from an outbreak of COVID-19 cases. This was supposed to be for just 11 days, but the situation worsened and one year later, we are still not able to have didactic activities in the classroom.

During this past year, changes were made in the university's administration and, therefore, the new coronavirus represented the greatest challenge the new management team had to deal with.

The management teams focused their attention on solutions to prevent the spread of the coronavirus and to protect the health and wellbeing of the students and the administrative staff. The decisions and resolutions taken

by BBU Administrative Council can be divided for analysis into four different categories:

1. Decisions regarding didactic activities;
2. Decisions regarding scientific and cultural activities;
3. Decisions regarding administrative activities; and
4. Resolutions regarding measures for supporting BBU students.

METHODOLOGY

The research goal of this article is to examine and analyse how did the Babeş-Bolyai University manage to prevent the spread of coronavirus within its departments and what were the most important crisis management services and solutions that they implemented in order to be able to keep the academic and teaching activities going.

For conducting this research, the analytical method chosen was document analysis. "Document analysis is a form of qualitative research in which documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning around an assessment topic" (Bowen, 2009, pp. 27-28). During the one-year period (March 2020-March 2021), all documents and resolutions emitted by the Administrative Council of Babeş-Bolyai University with regards to the evolution of the pandemic and repercussions on academic life were posted on the University's dedicated website²⁸.

This article is a result of analysing all these documents and includes all four categories of decisions and resolutions taken by BBU administration in its prevention strategy. The content of this article is divided into four main chapters. The first one looks at the decisions regarding academic activities in the last semester of the academic year 2019-2020 and the first semester of the academic year 2020-2021, with an emphasis on the *phenomenon of changing scenarios*. The second chapter goes over the decisions regarding scientific and cultural activities while the third one focuses on the decisions regarding the academic activities. Finally, the last chapter looks at the resolutions regarding the measures to support BBU students during these difficult times. The article ends with a review on the current situation.

DECISIONS REGARDING DIDACTIC ACTIVITIES

²⁸ See <https://www.ubbcluj.ro/ro/infoubb/covid19/>

Considering the circumstances generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the need to guarantee the safety of BBU students and the course of teaching activities, the first period of 11 days was extended through a resolution of the Administration Council, on March 13th and again on March 30th, following the state of emergency instituted by Military Order no. 3 of 24th March 2020. Teaching activities moved online, and the administration found ways to improve the connection with its students, by investing in online platforms (ZOOM and Microsoft Teams) and by offering technical support to the students and professors who needed it.

While the dates of final exams and of the admission to university approached, the Administration Council decided, on May 14th, by electronic vote, to move all activities to the online environment, including the admission process, and to find well-suited solutions for the new situation (investing in online platforms for admission and didactic activities, having online presentations on social media and, overall, creating a larger online presence for the university). This was a turning point for the academic life within BBU, because the decisions made with regards to the admission process and the investments in IT and staff were a success, and BBU had 5,000 more students accepted in the academic year 2020-2021 than the previous year, as said by the Rector of the University, Professor Daniel David, in an interview for PROTV news²⁹.

DECISIONS REGARDING THE DIDACTIC ACTIVITIES IN THE NEW ACADEMIC YEAR 2020-2021

As the pandemic continued throughout the summer, in September 2020, BBU Administration, considering the resolutions of the Faculty Councils, issued Resolution No. 12653/10.09.2020, which stated that the faculties would have full control over how they were going to proceed with the teaching in the first semester, allowing them to choose between three scenarios: online, hybrid, and face-to-face. Most of the faculties chose the

²⁹ See the interview here: <https://stirileprotv.ro>.

online option, but there were a few that opted for hybrid and even face-to-face³⁰.

In the light of the new academic year, the management of Babeş-Bolyai University implemented a new set of measures for organizing teaching activities in a safely manner. These measures included:

- HCA 14115 Addendum 1- “Conditions for the suspension of didactic activities requiring physical presence”, which stated the situations in which the onsite didactic activities were to be suspended.
- HCA 14115 Addendum 4 - Protocol for Faculties, which stated the “rules to abide by during the academic activity”.
- HCA 14115 Addendum 5 - COVID-19 Triage Protocol (see below).
- HCA 14115 Addendum 6 - COVID-19 Isolation Protocol for Students lodged in University Dormitories, and others regarding Protocol for the Dormitories, canteens, and cafeterias and for medical clinics dedicated to students.

³⁰ See: <https://www.ubbcluj.ro/ro/infoubb/covid19/deciziiubb/Resolution-on-didactic-activities-10.09.2020.pdf>

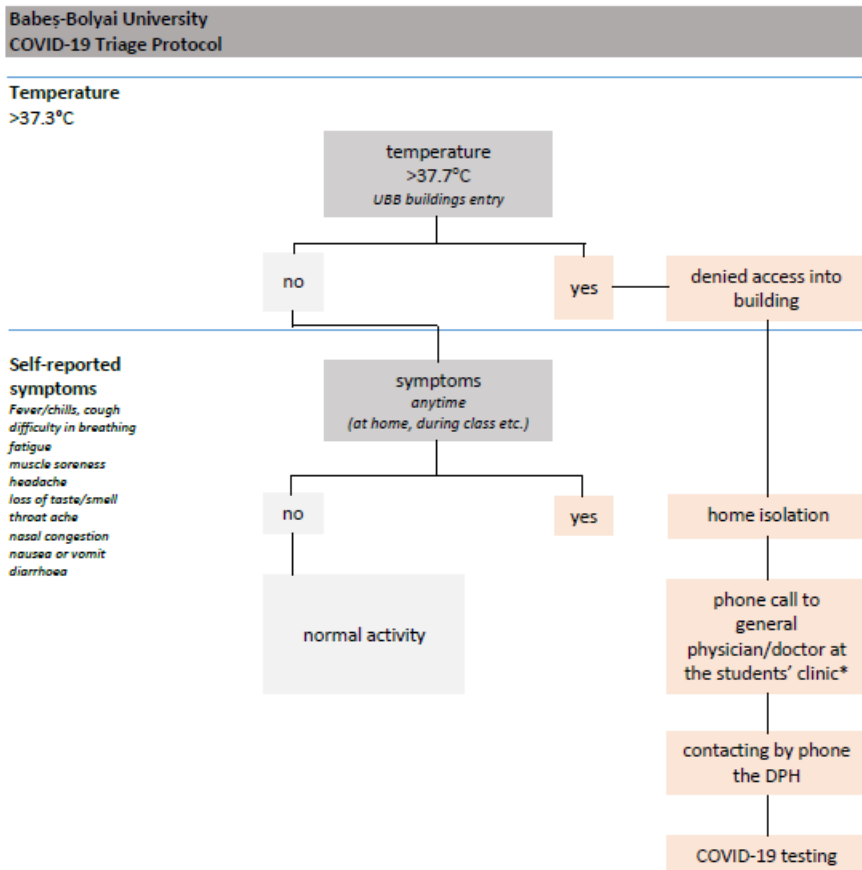


Figure 1. Babeș-Bolyai University's COVID-19 triage protocol

By the first two week of teaching, in the faculties that opted for a face-to-face or hybrid scenario, COVID-19 cases began to appear. This caused said faculties to switch to online activities entirely by November 15th, 2020. The first ones to switch were the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports (BBU Administration Council no. 15104 / October 12th, 2020) and the Faculty of Orthodox Theology (BBU Administration Council no. 15105 / October 12th, 2020), followed by the Faculty of Theatre and Film (BBU Administration Council no. 15444 / October 19th, 2020). Other faculties that switched due to the appearance of COVID-19 cases were: the Faculty of Greek-Catholic Theology (Oradea department), the Faculty of Engineering, the Faculty of Geography, the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, the Faculty of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering, the Faculty

of Environmental Science and Engineering, the Faculty of Physics. Some faculties, such as the Faculty of Theatre and Film (BBU Decision no. 18198 / December 23rd, 2020), and the Faculty of Engineering (BBU Decision no. 2003 / March 1st, 2021) switched back to hybrid, for laboratory, seminar and project teaching activities in the 2nd semester, once the number of COVID-19 cases decreased.

DECISIONS REGARDING SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

With regard to the scientific and research projects, the Administration decided to extend the implementation period, taking into consideration the delays caused by the pandemic:

“In the case of ongoing grants for supporting UBB employees’ competitiveness/ ongoing grants of didactical professional development, the period for spending the respective figures is extended by 6 months from the time the state of emergency is lifted.” (BBU Administration Council, April 2020)

All international and national conferences, as well as workshops, training sessions and any other activities involving crowds were postponed or moved to online, according to Resolution no. 6808/15th May 2020.

DECISIONS REGARDING ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIVITIES

One of the main concerns of the BBU Administration, besides students, was staff. This is why, on March, 13th a decision was made that all information and operations requested from the university administrative departments (auxiliary didactic and non-didactic staff) be sent online. Measures were taken to protect the employees and their families by allowing people with children under the age of 12 to take paid leave of absence in compliance with Law 19/2020.

During the state of emergency, the working hours included weekly rotation of employees, and within the departments where exclusive work from home was possible, it was implemented. Some administrative

departments and centres within the university were closed or their activity was suspended.

All departments took measures in order to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. All heads of departments took the necessary measures, including taking into consideration at least the “reasonable distance between employees in closed spaces, hygiene and gradual access of third parties” (BBU Senate, May 2020). Other measures included: masks and gloves became mandatory, workplaces were disinfected on a regular basis, and a COVID-19 response protocol was issued.³¹

RESOLUTIONS REGARDING MEASURES FOR SUPPORTING BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Babeș-Bolyai University has an interest in protecting and looking after its students. This is why, among the first decisions in the context of the new coronavirus and the pandemic was to suspend all penalties for the third instalment of the tuition fees, until the situation became stable. This measure is still active.

Other resolutions that included the protection and support for the students were:

- To limit the 2020-2021 tuition proposals to the level of 2019-2020 as stipulated in Senate Resolution no. 2386/18.02.2019.
- The sum of 500,000 lei from the UBB budget was added to cover all eligible requests for social scholarships.
- The sum of 225,000 lei from the UBB budget was allocated for financial support for the acquisition of 150 personal computers for students who were eligible for social scholarship.
- The penalties related to the delayed payment of accommodation and tuition fees were suspended for all students during the pandemic.

CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, Babeș-Bolyai University's new management dealt with a lot of issues caused by the pandemic, the coronavirus and the new social

³¹ See BBU protocol here:

https://www.ubbcluj.ro/ro/infoubb/covid19/deciziubb/UBB_scenarios_protocol.pdf

and economic changes. So far, there have been a few cases of COVID-19 within BBU, but due to the measures taken in the last year, the effects on the community were minimized and as few people as possible were affected.

The connection with students was kept through online channels such as online meetings with tutors, workshops for dealing with anxiety while quarantined, virtual tours of the university for new students and a lot of other interactive activities.

BBU's Facebook page registered an increase in popularity and students use it as a reliable source of information for updates regarding the pandemic, social and academic activities, events, and news.

In this case, the crisis management of the BBU Administration, from the Rector, Deans and Administrations Council to the General Administrative Directorate, have been able to implement suitable measures in order to protect the community and students.

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SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON TEACHING ETHICAL COMMUNICATION IN AN ESP CLASS. A FIRST STEP TOWARDS IMPROVED INTERNATIONAL CRISIS COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT: Certain types of (organizational / international) crises can be predicted to a certain extent, and what helps in preparing for them is not only to practise *the speed of response*, but also *how we react / respond* to them, i.e. how we use language to talk about crises and send out information about them. As such, people dealing with crises have to be prepared to use the appropriate language (words and phrases, as well as intonation and body language) in order not to create panic but to be able to manage the crisis in an efficient and timely manner. The way they send out messages is crucial. Therefore, the purpose of our article is to present some theoretical aspects of ethical communication in English, as well as how English language can be used appropriately to manage international crises effectively.

Keywords: ethical communication; international crisis communication, English for Specific Purposes

INTRODUCTION

This past year has shown us how unpredictable crises are. Although some crisis management studies tell us that we can predict them (Fink, 1986; Sornette, 2009) and prepare for them, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us quite the opposite, namely that many types of crises are rather unpredictable and unavoidable (for instance, natural disasters, cyberattacks, pandemics). What can help, however, in preparing for them is not only to practise *the speed of response*, but also *how we react / respond* to them, more precisely how we use language to talk about crises and send out information about them.

As such, people dealing with crises have to be prepared to use appropriate language (words and phrases, as well as intonation and body language) in order not to create panic but to be able to manage the crisis in an efficient and timely manner. The way in which messages are sent out is crucial, and an ethical approach to communication can prove to be useful. Therefore, the purpose of our article is to present some theoretical aspects of ethical communication, how it can be taught through an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course, as well as how English language can be used appropriately to manage international crises.

INTERNATIONAL CRISES, ESP, AND ETHICAL COMMUNICATION

International crises are no longer something rare. This could make one say that we are living not only in the era of globalization but also “in the era of crisis” (Ndlela, 2019, p. 1), and because of that English is used as the language of communication, of conveying messages to the public. English has been the *lingua franca* of international communication for a long time now (Anthony, 2018; Kırköz & Dikilitaş, 2018), and, although the UK left the European Union (E.U.), English still remains the language of communication in the E.U. and its institutions. Consequently, it is also the most widely taught second language in primary and upper secondary education around the E.U. member states (Eurostat, 2020).

Thus, the supremacy of English cannot be denied (Phillipson, 2009; Ricento, 2015; Wright, 2016). Consequently, English is also essential in managing international crises and acts as a bridge between crisis communicators, victims, states, various stakeholders – depending on the type of the crisis. However, due to the fact that most crises, as we have already mentioned, cannot be predicted, “leaders and other individuals have a tendency to be reactive and not mindful as they strive to keep up with internal and external demands and pressures” and “sometimes mistakes are made, values are violated, and trust is broken”, all these obviously “leading to significant negative consequences for the organization and its stakeholders” (Kovoor-Misra, 2019, p. 1).

Although crises cannot be always or entirely predicted, there are some things that can be done to prepare leaders and individuals for the unpredictable: leaders/crisis communicators should be taught to practise

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different responses to potential crises; leaders/crisis communicators should improve their English language skills since, as previously mentioned, English still is the language of international communication; leaders/crisis communicators should be made aware of the importance of ethics in their communication strategies.

For a long time now, it has been clear that “choosing the rights words” (Coombs, 1995; Coombs, 2014) can be one of the best strategies in dealing with crises. According to Coombs (2014), crisis communicators have several tasks to fulfil when dealing with difficult situations, namely: to come across as smooth on the camera, to have the ability to answer questions in an efficient manner, to be articulate and coherent in presenting the information about the crisis, and to be able to handle difficult questions (Coombs, 2014, p. 106).

Table 1. Tasks to fulfil in crisis communication (Coombs, 2014, p. 106)

Task Statement	Knowledge	Skills	Traits
Appear pleasant on camera	1. Understand the value of proper delivery.	1. Strong delivery	1. Low communication apprehension
Answer questions effectively	1. Understand the danger of long pauses. 2. Understand the steps to effective listening. 3. Appreciate the danger of “no comment” statements. 4. Understand the danger of arguing with reporters.	1. Ability to think quickly 2. Ability to use the steps to effective listening 3. Ability to use phrases other than “no comment” when an answer is not currently known 4. Ability to stay calm under pressure	1. High stress tolerance 2. Low verbal aggressiveness
Present crisis information clearly	1. Appreciate the problems with jargon. 2. Understand the need to structure responses.	1. Ability to avoid the use of jargon 2. Ability to organize responses	
Handle difficult questions	1. Understand the characteristics of tough questions.	1. Ability to identify tough questions 2. Ability to ask for questions to be reworded 3. Ability to preface tough questions in a tactful manner 4. Ability to challenge incorrect information in a question 5. Ability to explain why a question cannot be answered 6. Ability to evaluate the appropriateness of multiple-choice responses in a question 7. Ability to respond to questions with multiple parts	1. Low argumentativeness

Additionally, an ESP course can help leaders/crisis communicators manage information and manage meaning (Coombs, 2015) since the

purpose of such a course is “the teaching and learning of English as a second or foreign language where the goal of the learners is to use English in a particular domain” (Paltridge & Starfield, 2013, p. 2), in an authentic context. At the same time, ethical communication – which refers to “the application of ethical thinking to situations involving human communication” (Neher, 2020, p. 7)–, along with personal and professional values, helps leaders/crisis communicators pay more attention to the consequences of the messages they send out and be mindful of the wellbeing of the various stakeholders, focusing on maximizing the benefits and minimizing the harm (therefore implementing the views of Utilitarianism).

In ESP terms, the approach to language teaching and language learning that leaders/crisis communicators can benefit from is known as *communicative competence* (a term coined by Hymes in 1972), whose role is to help learners integrate language in context, to engage them in genuine social interaction to promote learning, to teach them how to respond in various situations (Newton, 2016, p. 175).

This communicative competence approach helps language learners focus on four major components: a linguistic one, a strategic one, a socio-linguistic one, and a discourse one (Canale & Swain, 1980).

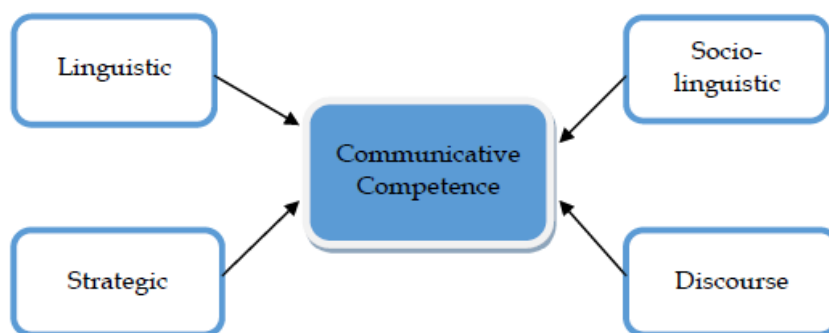


Figure 1. *The components of Communicative Competence*
(according to Canale & Swain, 1980)

All these four components are essential. Let us take the case of leaders/crisis communicators having to send information about a crisis to various stakeholders. They need accurate language to must be able not only

to send their message, but also to understand it, to use specialised vocabulary, to use grammar properly. This would be the linguistic component of communicative competence. In an ESP class, this component can be included in speaking exercises focused on grammar rules and specific contexts.

The strategic component refers to the verbal and non-verbal elements that are required in communication in order to overcome language barriers. This is essential for leaders/crisis communicators since in international crises the message they send out must be efficient, fluent, and adapted to their audience (stakeholders). In an ESP class,

This goes hand in hand with the third component of the communicative competence approach, the sociolinguistic one. Since international crises mean that (different) cultures are involved, leaders/crisis communicators must be prepared to send a message that is tailored appropriately, at the same time keeping in mind the existing cultural differences, as well as the possible cultural sensitivities. This can be taught through the topics proposed for discussion in an ESP class, through the vocabulary exercises proposed (to teach idioms, for instance), as well as through the degrees of formality and politeness necessary according to the situation.

Finally, the fourth component (discourse) helps leaders/crisis communicators use discourse markers in a suitable manner to give coherence and cohesion to their messages. This can be achieved in an ESP class not only through vocabulary exercises, but also through writing exercises.

ESP instructors can, however, do so much more. Besides teaching future leaders/crisis communicators how to use the English language appropriately, they can also create an appropriate environment for ethical communication. Although the classic roles of language instructors are those of needs assessors, syllabus designers, authentic materials developers and content-knowledgeable instructors (Belcher, 2006), ESP instructors can also instil values and virtues and pave the way for the introduction of ethical theories in English communication.

Values and virtues are essential in (international) crisis communication as they “make us the persons we are” and they “provide the foundation of both ethical living and success in business” (Solomon, 1999), and – we add – they also help leaders/crisis communicators focus on finding solutions

meant to bring the greater benefit to the largest number of people. Professor Robert Solomon, a professor of Philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin, spent most of his professional life researching business ethics and the importance of values and virtues in the business world since an ethical action “is the result of good character and sound judgement” (Neher, 2020, p. 17). In his 1999 book (“A Better Way to Think about Business. How Personal Integrity Leads to Corporate Success”), he discussed a series of virtues in detail, explaining what they mean, myths existing about each one of them, their deficiencies and usefulness. The list of virtues is summarised in the table below.

Table 2. *The Catalogue of Virtues* (Solomon, 1999)

Virtue Standards		
ability	Fairness	pride
acceptance	Generosity	prudence
amiability	Graciousness	responsibility
articulateness	Gratitude	saintliness
attentiveness	Heroism	shame (capable of)
autonomy	Honesty	spirit
caring	Humility	tolerance
charisma	Humour	toughness
compassion	Independence	trust
coolheadedness	Integrity	trustworthiness
courage	Justice	wittiness
determination	Loyalty	zeal

Several virtues from the table above can be instilled into those participating in an ESP class (future leaders/crisis communicators). For instance, the virtues of *caring*, *compassion*, *tolerance* can be taught through different topics of conversation, such as “Cultures”, “Discrimination”, “Human Rights”, “War and Peace”, where students are asked to analyse different cases and to express their opinions. *Compassion* is, additionally, essential when leaders/crisis managers craft their crisis response, as it “helps to improve the organizational reputation, to increase honoring of the account, and to facilitate intentions to engage in potential support behavior” (Coombs, 1999, p. 137).

The virtue of *independence* can be taught through individual activities where students are asked to solve tasks on their own, while the virtue of *trust* or that of *acceptance* can be instilled by asking participants to work in groups and to join forces to collaborate on various assignments given to

them. Or, to give another example this time taken from the business world, the virtues of *responsibility*, *loyalty*, or *integrity* can be taught through case studies related to ethical dilemmas or Corporate Social Responsibility. In all the aforementioned cases, the approach to language teaching remains that of the *communicative competence*, students therefore having the possibility of not only practising their English language skills, but also of giving voice to their values and virtues since “doing the ethical thing is simply part of the most fully human way of living” (Neher, 2020, p. 18).

By acquiring values and virtues, future leaders/crisis communicators can make sure that they will be prepared to craft appropriate responses bearing in mind that, in order to adopt an ethical stance, they have to think not only about their company’s/institution’s benefit, but also about the wellbeing of all the people involved in that crisis (*Utilitarianism*). Additionally, they learn to respect the dignity of all those affected (*Categorical Imperative*) and also to adopt a way of action that would be in line with the action taken by a virtuous person or professional (*Virtue Ethics*).

CONCLUSIONS

In a world marked by an increasing number of man-made or unpredictable crises, paying attention to the needs of the stakeholders has become a necessary response. Not only is it of utmost importance for leaders/crisis communicators to be extremely well trained to respond to crises, but they should also master the language of international communication (i.e. the English language) to make sure that their crisis responses are crafted appropriately, and they should also make sure that the decisions they make maximize the benefits and minimize the harms of all those involved.

An ESP course can be a suitable environment for professionals in public relations and crisis communication because, as we have already shown, the purpose of such a course is not limited to the teaching of grammar and vocabulary, but it also focuses on sociolinguistic and discourse components, as well as on instilling values and virtues that are essential in crafting responses in crisis situations.

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CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN THE NORWEGIAN TEENAGE SERIES 'SKAM'

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ABSTRACT: This paper intends to explore language borrowing and code-switching as communication practices employed in the Norwegian teenage series 'Skam' which depicts the life of youths belonging to different cultural backgrounds. Their identity, as well as their language practices are influenced by their affiliation to a peer group that varies in respect to members' social status and cultural backgrounds. Thus, the role of language as a marker of social and cultural identity needs to be acknowledged in a cross-cultural communication setting. Research on youth language has steadily intensified as adolescents' language in today's context is heavily influenced by globalization, the use of media, and of an increase in technological advances. The paper analysed three episodes (1st, 6th and 11th) from the first season and three episodes (1st, 5th and 10th) from the last season. A qualitative research was conducted in order to shed light on the types of code-switching and language borrowing performed by the actors in 'Skam'. Findings indicate that inter- and intra-sentential code-switching is performed by the characters either to establish continuity with the previous speaker, or to emphasize a point, express group membership and attract attention.

Keywords: English; Norwegian; SKAM; anglicisms; code-switching; adolescent language.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Language is a dynamic, sociocultural phenomenon that undergoes constant changes to suit the demands of a modern, globalized and technologized society. The interest in investigating youths' language, both in online and offline contexts, has begun to intensify as "adolescents are the

linguistic movers and shakers [...] and as such a prime source of information about linguistic change.” (Eckert, 1997, p. 52). They endorse language innovations that “will sooner or later be accepted in the standard language” (Stenström & Myre Jørgensen, 2009, p. 1). A steadily growing field of research on youth language aims to investigate language use in various contexts and is rooted in understanding the communicative practices that construct youths’ identities (see for reference Bucholtz, 2011; Cotrau, 2005; Drange, 2009; Drummond, 2018; Paris, 2011).

Studies conducted within the field of sociocultural linguistics offer diverse perspectives on the intricate connection between language, culture and society. Admittedly, language is a powerful identity marker that “is vital to the processes through which identities are created, mobilized and transformed” (Bucholtz, 2011, p. 2). To understand the process of language change, Drummond (2018, p. 9) conducted an ethnographic research among urban adolescents “to explore the ways in which young people enact identities through linguistic and non-linguistic practices” and how these identities are perceived by themselves and others. One element that is relevant to consider in the context of language change is that youths should not be perceived as a homogenous group as “there is much inter- and intra-variation in the speech of young people” (Drummond, 2018, p.14). By examining language in some of the episodes in ‘Skam’ we intended to better understand how the actors’ identity generates a repertoire of communicative styles in which language borrowing, especially anglicisms and code-switching are prevalent features.

Borrowing, considered as the linguistic influence of a source language on a recipient language (Sunde, 2018, p. 106), is commonly perceived in a diachronic process of integration. In this respect, borrowing can be regarded as having a direct or indirect integration pattern (Pulcini et al., 2012). In the case of direct integration, loanwords are imported in the recipient language as they are without any modification. This is the case of words that have become international: e.g., ‘pizza’, ‘selfie’. The indirect integration includes a process of hybridization, the outcome of which would be assigning a different spelling or utterance to a word to sit more naturally in a certain language. Calques, i.e., word-for-word translations from the source language into the recipient language, represent another instance of indirect integration. Both types of integration exert an influence

that can manifest itself at different levels within a language, within the lexical, the morphological, phonological and syntactic level.

Code-switching refers to the simultaneous or interchangeable shift between two or more languages within the same conversation (Grosjean, 1982, p. 145). In a traditional view, code-switching was associated with a bilingual context and it implied sound proficiency (spoken or written) in all languages used. Today's context, marked by multilingualism and multiculturalism but also by the acknowledgment that the distinct lines between bilingualism and second language acquisition are blurred (Lynch 2015, p. 11) led to the assertion that "code-switching has become a feature of both bilinguals and non-bilinguals" (Mureşan & Pop, 2020, p. 122). Likewise, it is a phenomenon that can be visible with prevalence in the art industry (music, movies, literature), but also in social media or the educational context (i.e., learning a second or a foreign language). Undoubtedly, the status of English as an international language favours code-switching practices. In Norwegian for example, the primary source of language borrowing comes from English (Sunde & Kristoffersen, 2018, p. 275).

According to Poplack (1980, p. 581-618), several categories of code-switching can be identified: inter-sentential code-switching (i.e., the insertion of a phrase from the source language in the recipient language in a written or oral discourse); intra-sentential code-switching (i.e. the insertion of words or phrases from a source language in the middle of a sentence uttered in the recipient language); tag-switching (i.e. exclamations, tags, discourse markers, terms of address, etc. from the source language).

The reasons for performing code-switching can be diverse: to express group membership (Poplack, 1980); to establish continuity with the previous speaker (Hoffman, 2014); to achieve particular discursive aims, to fill linguistic gaps, to express ethnic identity (Bullock & Toribio, 2009); habitual experience, to emphasize a point, to attract attention (Malik, 1994).

English code-switching and the use of anglicisms in 'Skam' present an iconic image of youth language use and testify "the dominance of the Western culture in their daily lives" (Mureşan & Pop, 2020, p. 123) explaining, at least partly, the success of this drama series. In trying to understand the process of language change and how discourse practices construct identities, we need to acknowledge that "the language of young

people in urban centres around Europe appears to be undergoing a significant development right now" (Drummond, 2018, p.14).

CONTEMPORARY LANGUAGE USE IN 'SKAM'

'Skam', a Norwegian online television series broadcasted between 2015-2017, has gained worldwide recognition among teenagers even if the programme targeted the audience in Norway and thus no official subtitles were issued. Its name can be translated in English with 'Shame'. The uniqueness of 'Skam' stems from adolescents' use of contemporary language in diverse, genuine informal interaction contexts. It provides avenues for ethnographic and sociolinguistic investigation. English is a main provider of language transfer in both code-switching instances and the use of anglicisms. Occasionally, actors use 'kebabnorsk', an urban multi-ethnolect which incorporates elements from languages of non-Western immigrants (Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic, Urdu, etc.). It represents another means of allowing characters in the series to construct their identities.

The topics targeted by the series were of interest to many adolescents both in Norway and worldwide: sexuality, expressing feelings, identity, friendships, establishing relationships, multiculturalism in Norway. This also explains the global success of the series.

Features of language transfer are often encountered in 'Skam' but these are accepted and understood by all interlocutors. In addition, the success of a linguistic innovation depends on this common acceptance and understanding (Sunde & Kristoffersen, 2018, p. 305). Worldwide, English has a great impact in social media and the entire entertainment industry. The access to the Internet favours the contact with the English language. In addition, English is a compulsory foreign language in Norway that is taught already from kindergarten. Books, research and teaching are to a great extent written and conducted in English. Therefore, it has been created a context that is conducive to the use of English in various formal and informal settings.

Actors in 'Skam' use English for stylistic purposes, they might use an English term with a Norwegian pronunciation or they use of word-for-word translations (Mureşan & Pop, 2020, p. 126). The code-switching "Alt er love!" [All is love!] gradually became an expression associated with the series 'Skam' as actors included it often in their discourse. Therefore, to

indicate their connection and affiliation to the tv series, fans all over the world used it whenever they posted messages or comments related to the teenage drama.

The different cultural backgrounds of the characters in 'Skam' reflect the changes that have taken place within the Norwegian society in the past decades, as more than half a million immigrants have settled in Norway since 1995, while discussions and debates about integration, multiculturalism and national identity have flourished in Norway in recent years. Hence, this society that has been ethnically and historically homogenous needed to adapt to the increasing diversity by strengthening unity, by promoting diversity within the framework of Norwegian values, but also by ensuring representation of diversity (Eriksen, 2013, p. 1).

Moreover, 'Skam' was produced by the public television in Norway, NRK, which has the obligation to serve the social and cultural needs within the society and to provide the population with content that reflects the Norwegian language, identity and culture, while its mission was to reconnect with younger audiences (Andersen & Sundet, 2019, p. 5) that seemed to prefer social media to television.

Thus, the producers succeeded in rendering the Norwegian identity through characters such as Noora, today's version of Ibsen's Nora from *A Doll's House*, spelled with double 'o', which Oxfeldt considers to reflect both the originality of the character and a more culturally diverse society influenced by the Arabic culture (Oxfeldt, 2017, p. 48). Noora is the main character of the second season, whereas Sana, the foremost representative of today's multicultural Norway, a Muslim character that brings forth the prejudices within the Norwegian society, is the main character of the last season (Oxfeldt, 2017, p. 48).

Last, it is important to mention how the diverse cultural backgrounds of the characters influence their language practices. English, as the mainstream language in the online environment, acts as a linking element between Norwegian youths and those with a different cultural heritage.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study sought to address the following research question: What are the types of code-switching and anglicisms used by teenagers in 'Skam', season 1 (episodes 1, 6 and 11), and season 4 (episodes 1, 5 and 10)?

A qualitative data analysis was conducted and code-switching and anglicisms were identified, analysed and categorized according to the framework presented (i.e., types of code-switching, types of language borrowing, frequency).

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The qualitative descriptive analysis revealed the following types of code-switching:

1. Inter-sentential (a sentence in Norwegian is followed or preceded by a sentence in English):
 - a. Jeg ville lagt fra meg **"The Game"** og lest **"He's just not that into you"**. [I wish I would have dropped "The Game" and read instead "He's just not that into you"] (season 1, episode 6)
 - b. **Black swan?** (season 1, episode 6)
 - c. **Karma is a bitch.** (season 1, episode 11)
 - d. **You wish!** (season 4, episode 1)
 - e. **"Smoke weed every day."** (season 4, episode 1)
 - f. Har jeg ikke? **Ok, sorry.** Jeg gjør det med en gang. [*Haven't I? Ok, sorry. I'll do it in a minute.*] (season 4, episode 5)
 - g. **-Sorry,** jeg glemte tiden. [*Sorry, I forgot the time.*]
-No stress. (season 4, episode 10)
 - h. Nei. **Love me!** [*No. Love me!*] (season 4, episode 10)
 - i. **See you there!** [...]
-Halla, boys. [*Hi, boys*] (season 4, episode 10)
 - j. -Er det vanlige kjøttboller? [*Are these ordinary meatballs?*]
-Nei. **In a pretty hot sauce.** [*No. In a pretty hot sauce*] (season 4, episode 10)
 - k. Eskild! **Hands off.**
Min mann. [*My man.*] (season 4, episode 10)
2. Intra-sentential (a word, phrase or clause in English is inserted in the middle of a sentence in Norwegian):
 - a. Jeg hadde helt glemt det! **Sorry,** altså! Jeg huska det ikke. [*I had completely forgotten about it! Sorry, then! I didn't remember.*] (season 1, episode 1)

- b. Jeg ville droppet den **eyelineren**! Du ser ut som en **slut**! [*I would have dropped the eyeliner! You look like a slut!*] (season 1, episode 1)
 - c. - Hva svarte han? [*What did he answer?*]
-Ingenting, men han **screenshotta** det. [*Nothing, but he took a screenshot of it.*] (season 1, episode 6)
 - d. Jeg **ditchet** bestevenninnene mine. [*I ditched my best friends.*] (season 1, episode 11)
 - e. Alle jenter med respekt for seg selv, har **blacket** ut en eller annen gang. [*All girls who respect themselves have blacked out at some point.*] (season 1, episode 11)
 - f. - Det går bra. **Chiller'n**, jeg fikser det. Jeg fikser det. [*It's all right. Chill out, I'll fix it. I'll fix it.*] (season 4, episode 1)
 - g. - Hun liker **bad boys**. Kjenner vi noen? [*She likes bad boys. Do we know anyone?*] (season 4, episode 1)
 - h. - Er ikke det **disrespect** overfor religionen? [*Isn't this disrespect for religion?*] (season 4, episode 5)
 - i. På samme måte som du "glemte" å **adde** meg og Noora på bussiden. [*In the same way you "forgot" to add me and Noora on the side of the bus*]
 - j. Eller at den havnet i **spamfilteret**? [*Or that it remained in the spamfilter?*]
 - k. Jeg har **googlet** litt, og det er vanlig å gi gaver. [*I have googled it, and it's normal to give presents.*] (season 4, episode 10)
 - l. -Han er **ålreit**. [*He is all right.*] (season 4, episode 10)
 - m. Litt **over the top** på slutten der. [*A bit over the top there at the end.*] (season 4, episode 10)
 - n. For hun har en skikkelig **soft side**. [*For she has a really soft side.*] (season 4, episode 10)
3. Tag-switching (inserting a tag from one language to another one):
 - a. **Yes!** Vi skal ikke ha barn! [*Yes! We will not have children!*] (season 1, episode 11)
 - b. **Hello, boys.** (season 4, episode 1)

- c. **Shit**, jeg glemte det. [*Shit, I forgot about that.*] (season 4, episode 1)
- d. Hey, **girl**. [*Hello, girl.*] (season 4, episode 10)
- e. Og så kom du gående forbi, og jeg bare: "**Wow! Damn!**" [*And I just passed by and I only: Wow! Damn!*] (season 4, episode 10)
- f. - **Ouch**. (season 4, episode 10)
- g. - **Yey**. (season 4, episode 10)
- h. - **Wow!** Skal vi prøve? [*Wow! Shall we try?*] (season 4, episode 10)

DISCUSSIONS

When performing both inter-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching, interlocutors had to demonstrate their proficiency in English. Still, we consider that within the intra-sentential code-switching more focus is placed on awareness of syntax and morphology principles in both languages so that communication is coherent and does not break down. Code-switching was linked to different functions: greeting (1.i), establishing continuity with a previous speaker (1.g; 3.b; 3.d), stating an apology (1.f; 2.a), expressing ideas (1.j), emphasizing a point (1.h; 1.k), establishing a relation with the interlocutor (1.d) or expressing group membership (2.f; 2.l). In regard to the number of inter-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching performed in the episodes that we analysed, it can be stated that the amount is considerably higher in the last season.

Tag-switching included interjections (3.a, 3.e, 3.f, 3.g, 3.h), vocatives (3.b, 3.d) or expletives (3.c).

The analysis of the data gathered revealed that the language borrowings performed were both direct and indirect. This paper has focused solely on anglicisms. Various anglicisms related to technology and social media were used: *screenshotta* [*screenshot*], *å adde* [*to add*] *spamfilteret* [*spamfilter*], *googlet* [*to google*]. These anglicisms underwent a "process of integration that generates both phonetic and morphologic changes" (Drange 2009, p. 161). These underwent a process of adaptation to a Norwegian orthography and pronunciation.

Other anglicisms maintained their original meaning in the donor language but received new morphological and syntactic functions: a

Norwegian gender (eyelineren [eyeliner]), a verb form (ditchet [*to ditch*] or chiller'n [chill out]). The use of these anglicisms is not grounded in any lexical shortage. They have been used as an identity marker. Two indirect borrowings, such is the case of the following two clagues have been identified: ålreit [*all right*], blacket ut [*blacked out*]. The word "halla" (1. i) is a slang that is derived from the word 'hallo'. In this case the word "halla" has been integrated phonologically and was assigned a Norwegian pronunciation.

It is relevant to indicate some limitations linked to the present research paper. The analysis targeted only some episodes from season one and season four. Consequently, the findings cannot be related to the whole series, and thus generalizations were avoided. The research question focused on particular episodes as our intention was to provide a glimpse into the informal discourse of Norwegian teenagers as depicted in an online tv series. Equally important to mention is that the researchers who conducted the research as investigated the use of code-switching and anglicisms are not native speakers of Norwegian. Still, they have certified competence in this language.

CONCLUSIONS

The Norwegian youth TV series SKAM (Shame) has gained worldwide popularity, and the use of the English language throughout the series reveals the connecting function of the language, its role as mediator between cultures. An authentic image of the Norwegian teenage life, of Norway's society that has been influenced by the increasing immigration in the last decade, the series shows how younger generations in Norway tend to engage more in code-switching and language borrowing, indicating the global influence of English, perceived as an essential part of their daily lives. This paper analysed the use of borrowing and code-switching in the informal speech of the teenagers as it emerged from SKAM, but also their cross-cultural function. Two types of code-switching, inter-sentential and intra-sentential, but also various anglicisms were identified in the last season of the TV series, season 4, testifying for the strong influence of English in the Norwegian teenage daily life, but also for the way it enhances cross-cultural communication between teenagers with different cultural backgrounds.

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DG COMM DURING THE JUNCKER COMMISSION: COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND RESULTS

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ABSTRACT: “Europe will be forged in crises and will be the sum of the solutions adopted for those crises” said Jean Monnet, perhaps the figure one can most easily associate with the idea of a ‘founding father’ for the European Union. And indeed, in its quite lengthy lifespan even until today, the EU has been forged, reforged, and forged anew again in many crises, and has always emerged stronger and more united from them. There is no doubt that the challenges that the last decades have portrayed for Europe, and even the current pandemic, will play a role in how the EU looks in the years ahead, but the EU will surely survive these trials. The more difficult crisis that Europe will face is one that comes from within – an identity crisis. Democratic deficit, lack of legitimacy, or however we want to call it, this distance, imagined or not, between Brussels and the citizens of the EU must be closed if the Union is to continue to bring peace and prosperity. Communication, often left behind in the hierarchy of priorities for the Commission or the Parliament, might just provide the solution to this issue, and the Juncker Commission, through DG COMM, tried to do just that. In this article, we will analyse the Strategic Plan that DG COMM put forward in 2016 and we will see how much success it had in bridging the gap between citizens and institutions.

Keywords: DG COMM; Juncker Commission; Communication; Strategy

INTRODUCTION

The European Union is one of the most ambitious and most idealistic political projects the world has ever seen. To even dare to dream of a united European continent after the horrific first part of the twentieth century would, in 99 out of 100 cases, only make you a wishful thinker. Yet, the European Union has managed to be that elusive case when ideals and morals actually triumphed over the bitter-cold reality of power politics and nationalism. It is near impossible to even grasp the immense benefits that

the EU managed to bring, not only to the European continent, its states and most importantly its citizens, but even to the wider world. After more than 60 years since the first timid steps that started this whole process, the European Union has managed to become not just a European model, or a model for regional integration in other parts of the world, but truly a global leader, as Anu Bradford excellently draws attention to, in her work on the “Brussels Effect” (Bradford, 2020), to the fact that using old understandings of power as simply military power and power-projection capabilities or economic prowess is not the best way to look at global politics in the 21st century. Indeed, the power of the EU on the global stage lies not intrinsically in its economic or military might, but in its power to shape the actions and way of thinking of other actors to its own will and its power to influence other actors to act in ways that the EU perceives to be correct, moral and just (Läidi, 2008). Still, the EU is not a perfect mechanism, nor is it excused from the dangers that crisis always present to a political construction. The last decades have shown that the EU is, just as any other (super)power, always at risk in the face of the tumultuous machinations of the world economy and politics and must always be ready to improve itself if it is to keep alive the legacy of peace, prosperity and unity on which it is built. The Economic Crisis of the late 2000’s and early 2010’s, the disastrous Brexit saga that seems to finally be over in 2021 (Sandford, 2021) and not to mention the devastating Covid-19 health and subsequent impending economic crisis (Gopinath, 2020) have all been extremely difficult challenges for the European construction in the last two decades, but somehow, despite all of these issues and problems, the EU is still here and going strong.

But now that the waters seem to be settling, or at least we can hope that they will, for it is impossible to know when another crisis will come, and with the renewed hope that the scientific progress brought in the form of an unprecedented development of not just 1, but several vaccines to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU must turn its attention towards the future.

With the exit of the United Kingdom from the Union finally over, all the effort spent on negotiations and deals or no-deals dramas finally being once again available, the EU must dedicate its focus and energies towards a concrete plan for the future of the Union. Indeed, a starting point for this has already been established by the Juncker Commission and its White

Paper on the Future of Europe with its five possible scenarios (European Commission, 2017). Unfortunately, nothing concrete has emerged yet from this initial starting point. Will the EU focus on the single market and renounce its shy approach towards the completion of a formal supra-national government? Or will the EU just carry on as if there are no problems that need to be addressed? Will we see two, three, or even more “speeds” in the EU? Or will the EU try to finally complete the dream that started its construction and try again to push an EU Constitution that would finally see a truly United Europe? All of these questions must be answered by the EU, together with its citizens, for uncertainty is never a good gamble in a democratic society and it only invites those that wish to speculate and profit in the gaps and grey areas provided by the lack of unity and resolve to do so, as we have seen more and more from such “role-models” of democracy as in Hungary or Poland in recent years (Csehi and Zgut, 2021).

Perhaps more pressing than providing a path out of the proposed five, a path that will most likely be only optional for the EU to continue on, the European Union must address, among other topics, one of the hottest issues it faces: the infamous democratic deficit (Murdoch, Connolly & Kassim, 2018).

The topic of democratic deficit, that entails the fact that many citizens of the EU perceive the EU as a distant, intangible, and inaccessible entity (Crombez, 2003) that does not represent their interests is a complex one. The reasons behind this deficit are plenty, and its results too are multiple (Kratochvil & Sycrha, 2019), but perhaps the most important outcome that stems from this perception of the European citizens is the lack of legitimacy that the EU, and especially the European Commission, has when trying to justify its actions. It goes without saying that any democratic institution that loses legitimacy or does not have enough legitimacy to justify its actions towards the people that it should represent is *de facto* no longer a democratic institution. How democratic is the European Commission is another question that arises and perhaps one of the biggest reasons why the EU suffers in this field (Haverland, de Ruiter & Van de Walle, 2018), as European Elections do not necessarily indicate the political make-up of the following Cabinet of Commissioners³². Of course, changing the way in

³² For example, the 2019 European Elections saw the EPP, despite some losses, once again as the biggest party in the European Parliament. However, Manfred Weber, the leader of the

which the EC is appointed would entail a massive undertaking and it would require a huge shift towards flexibility from the nation states, a shift that is unlikely to happen very soon, but one that eventually will become inevitable. In the meantime, however, the EU can pursue other, less complicated, and less expensive avenues by which to increase citizens' awareness and to bring the citizens closer to the EU and the way in which it operates.

Thus, the following pages will focus on trying to answer the research question: 'What was the impact of the Juncker Commissions Communication Strategy on the way the European Commission deals with public communication?' Structurally, we will look at the fundamental problems that underpin the relation between the European Union and the topic of communication, then we will analyze the general patterns of how the European Commission deals with public communication and most importantly, we will inspect the strategy of the Juncker Commission on communication. In terms of methodology, this paper will use a structural analysis, with the help of secondary data analysis, focusing on official papers and documents from the European Commission.

FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS

One of the most basic ways of seeing if people are interested in the affairs of the EU is to see where their attachment lies, for it is a good rule of thumb that you will not dedicate much time and effort to understanding something that you are not attached to. The Eurobarometer data shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2 portray a pretty clear image. While over 57% of EU citizens feel 'very attached' and 35% of them feel 'fairly attached' towards their nation states, only 18% of them feel 'very attached' and 41% feel 'fairly attached'. The more distressing figures are shown in Figure 2, where we can see that 27% of citizens feel "not very attached" and 11% feel "not at all attached" towards the European Union. That is not a very comforting statistics for any political organization that wants to tackle complicated and polarizing issues such as the transfer of political powers from national states towards Brussels.

Party and the *Spitzenkandidat* who was supposed to be the new President of the Commission was replaced by the European Council's nominalization of an outsider in the person of Ursula von der Leyen.

DG COMM DURING THE JUNCKER COMMISSION: COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND RESULTS

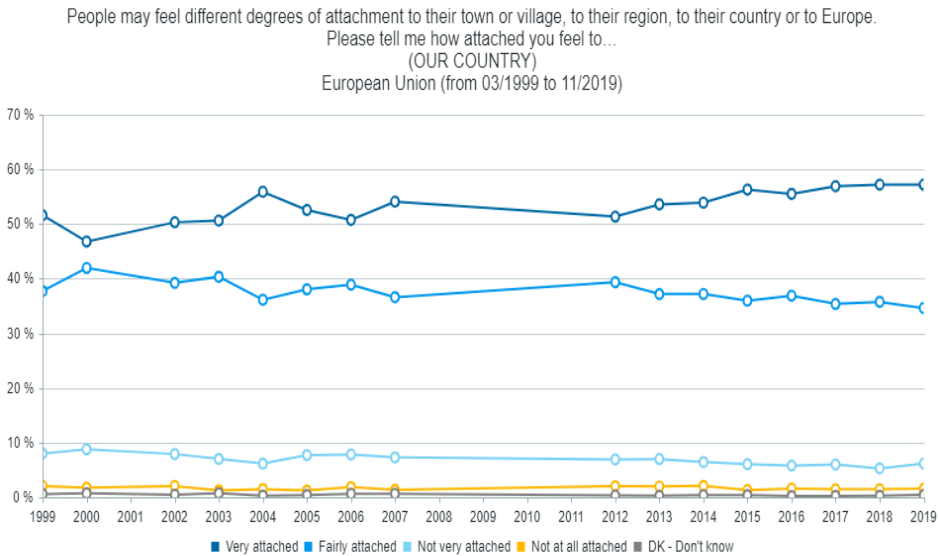


Figure 2: Evolution of attachment towards national states. Source: Eurobarometer

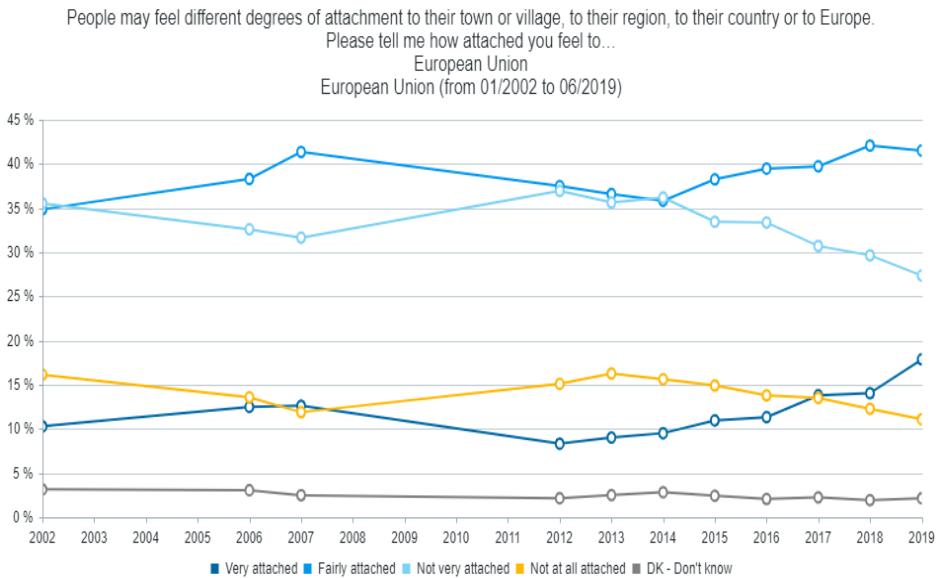


Figure 3: Evolution of attachment towards the European Union. Source: Eurobarometer

Another interesting, if not frightening statistic is also provided by the Eurobarometer opinion polls on the percentage of citizens of the European

Union member states that have heard about the European Parliament (Figure 3) and the European Commission (Figure 4). While at a first glance, the figures seem high and no concern seems to be needed, a few aspects can arise from this simple comparison. Firstly, the fact that 92% of the EU citizens have heard about the European Parliament and 85% about the European Commission cannot be described other than a complete public communication disaster for the EU. By 2019, when the data was collected, the last accession to the Union was that of Croatia, all the way back in 2013. That is more than enough time for all the Croatians to get to know the EU institutions. Yet still, over 41 million EU citizens have not heard about the European Parliament, and over 75 million citizens have not even heard about the European Commission. This is not to say that these people have not completely understood the complex inner workings of the European Union's legislative process, but that they have simply never heard about these institutions, which form the backbone of European Construction, and one of them is even elected by the citizens.

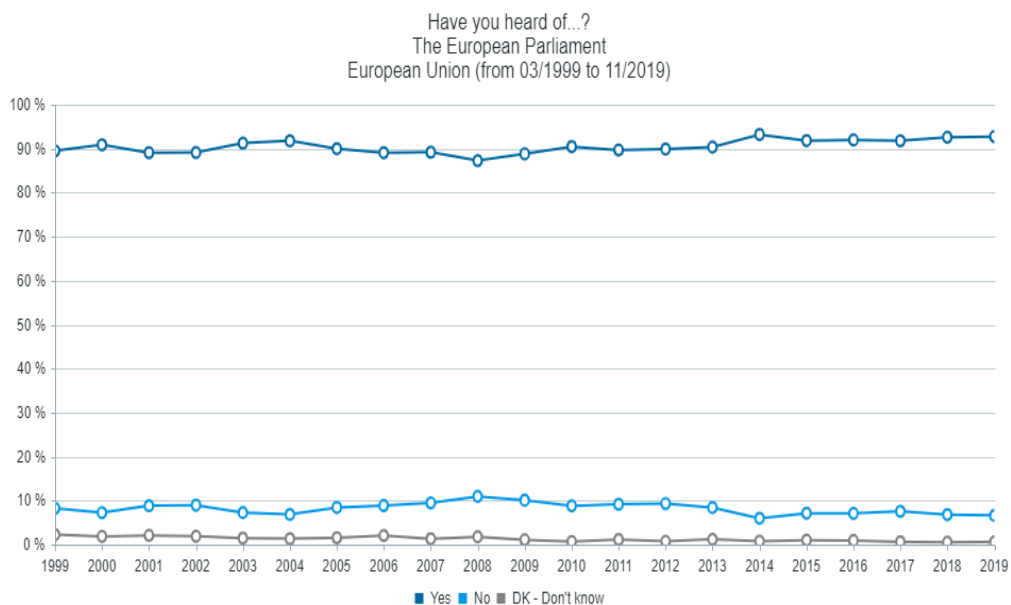


Figure 4: Percentage of citizens aware of the European Parliament. Source: Eurobarometer

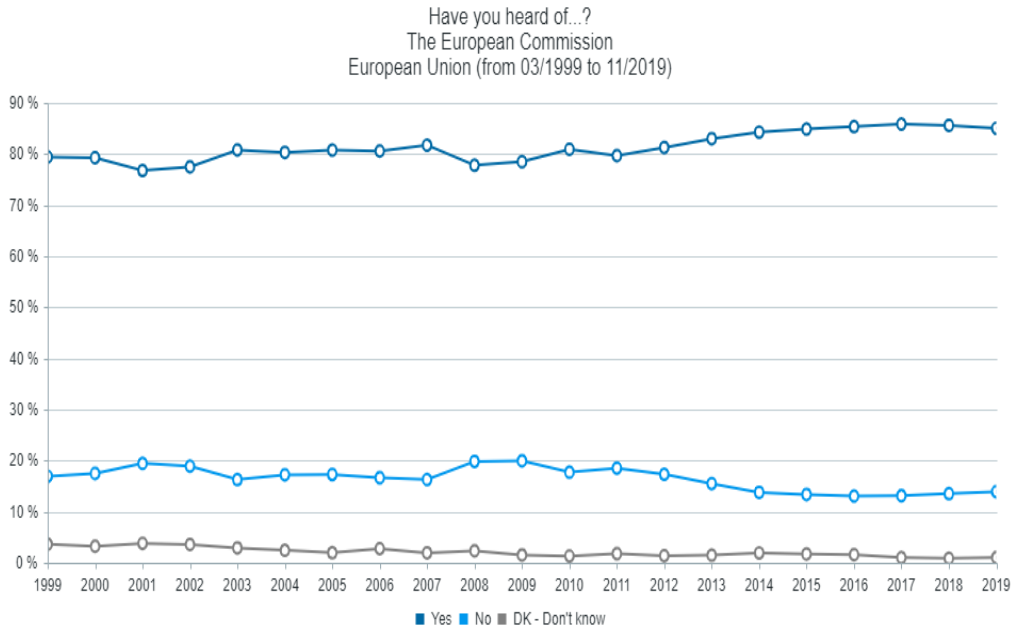


Figure 5: Percentage of citizens aware of the European Commission. Source: Eurobarometer

GENERAL TRENDS OF THE COMMISSION IN ITS PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

The European Commission has a long and complicated relationship with communication and the way in which it interacts with the public that it ultimately serves (Valentini & Nesti, 2010). While for a large part of its history the external communication was not seen as a key factor in the eyes of the actors responsible for the actions, goals and strategies of the Commission, and the relationship between the public and the Commission was one of general disinterest, both from the public, as the Commissions work was rarely seen as important enough for the wide public to be interested in, and from the Commission itself, as it did not have the need to justify and legitimize itself for its decisions (it is also worth mentioning that the complex nature of the functioning of the EU, including the Commission, is still to this day a major factor in the disinterest of the general public towards the work of the Commission), the Maastricht and Lisbon Treaties have completely changed this aspect. The role of the Commission is now, more than ever, scrutinized from every corner of the

Union, and general interest showed by the public and the media towards the inner workings of the Commission is higher than ever (Rauh, 2018), though that is not to say that it is close on any levels to the interest the public and the media shows for the national, regional or even local bodies of government and their actions and their public communication. The reasons for this disparity are complex and worthy in and of themselves of dedicated research and thus I will not try to tackle them now, though I will briefly mention that some researchers point the blame not necessarily towards the Commission or the public, but rather to the actor that should provide the link between the two – the media, and the way in which it, as a crucial actor in a democratic system, chooses to interpret this role (Bijsmans & Altides, 2007).

Still, the growing demographic deficit and the widening gap between the actions of the EU, especially the Commission, and the general public of the increasingly larger Union, meant that Brussels had to tackle the issue. Negative opinion surveys and referendum outcomes after 1990 forced the EU to finally address the issue of public communication and change its way of dealing with the topic, which was best described by Christoph Meyer as a mixture “between halfhearted reform attempts, political neglect and outright hostility” (Meyer, 1999, p. 8). Indeed, after 2000, the Commission has started to invest more and more resources into its communication efforts, including naming a Commissioner devoted to this task (which in time became the responsibility of the Directorate-General for Communication, or DG COMM), drafting Strategic Plans for how to solve Communication problems and has underwent a general transparency effort meant to ease the difficult technicalities that the average citizen has in understanding the role and functioning of the Commission (including, but not limited to, a growing social media presence and an increased public presence of the national bureaus of the Commission) (Bijsmans, 2007).

It is important to note that communication with the public is not just a political or strategic goal of the EU and specifically the Commission. It is true that in a detached, strictly objective analysis public communication is generally seen, from a political point of view, as rather a hinderance, or something that is not necessarily pleasant but rather needed, even in democratic states. But the Commission is not simply another political entity created by the nationalist wave of the 18th or 19th centuries, it is the ‘engine’ that powers the whole European construction, a construction that is built

on the noble ideals of peace and prosperity for the whole European continent and its peoples. Thus, to respect those ideals, and the legal basis on which it is built – namely the Charter of Fundamental Rights which has several Articles that provide the European citizens the right to information (Article 11), the right to access documents relating to oneself and to be heard (Article 41) and perhaps most importantly the right to access the documents of the EU Institutions (Article 42) – the EU, through the Commission, has to strive ever harder to ‘close the gap’ between the public perception, media attention and its own inner workings.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF THE JUNCKER COMMISSION

Under the Juncker Commission, the overarching emphasis on communication was to have a unitary, single voice of the Commission, as the Commission itself describes in its 2014 document on the Working Methods of the Commission: “Communication can only be successful if the Commission speaks with one voice, reflecting the principle of collegiality” (European Commission, 2014), and to confine the communication efforts as much as possible into a single entity – namely the Directorate-General for Communication – DG COMM.

Indeed, under President Juncker, DG COMM, alongside the Spokesperson’s Service (SPP) which is now an “integral part of DG Communication, placed under the authority of the President” (European Commission, 2014), received the important and difficult task to unify the entire communication efforts of the Commission. This task is by no means an easy one, especially when you take into consideration the 28 (at the time) Commissioners, their 28 national backgrounds, 28 Heads of Cabinet, Deputy Heads of Cabinet and so on. To channel all of these often conflictual and opposing interests into a single, coherent, concise, and clear line of communication is by no means facile. In order to achieve this, DG COMM, through the SPP, received larger control over the communication teams and efforts of the Commissioners, with the Chief Spokesperson of the European Commission being, for all intents and purposes, the most important actor in the entire Communication process of the European Commission (aside from the President). This mechanism is rather simple in the way in which it operates. Each Commissioner has a Communication Adviser that more or less acts as a press officer combined with a speech

writer. In turn, all the 28 Communication Advisers, are obliged to maintain a permanent contact link with the SPP and continuously update the SPP on their and their Commissioners communication activities. Even more, the Chief Spokesperson will exert more control over the Commissioners communication by outright deciding which are the acceptable “Lines to Take”, or more simply put the acceptable communication points and the limits in which the Commissioners must confine their discourse and communicating them daily towards the staffs of the Members of the College of Commissioners (European Commission, 2014).

The SPP, and thus DG COMM, received this significant increase in their abilities to influence and even control the communication outputs of the entire Commission to facilitate the aims of President Juncker, especially the move towards a more political approach. And to have a more political approach and to achieve the 10 political aims outlined at the beginning of the five-year term of the Commission (Bassot and Hiller, 2019), the Commission required, at a fundamental level, a unity in discourse, a unity that cannot, realistically, exist without a top-down approach, as we see here, where the President, through DG COMM and the SPP, which are under his direct control, can in their turn, directly control the communication outputs and the discourse red-lines and limits of the entire cabinet.

But while the SPP is tasked with, more or less subtly, controlling the external communication of the Commission, DG COMM has the task of coordinating both the external and internal communication. The mission statement of DG COMM is “**Listen - Advise - Engage**” (European Commission, 2016, p. 3). The three elements thus define the triple role that DG COMM provides for the European Commission, namely:

Listen – As part of their executive service to the College of Commissioners, DG COMM must provide “high-quality country specific information and analysis” that will be used in “the College’s decision-making process” (European Commission, 2016, p. 10).

Advise – DG COMM, as the entity in charge of the entire public communication of the Commission, also referred to as the corporate service of DG COMM, must advise³³ all parts of the Commission’s apparatus on

³³ The term advise is used, in my opinion, rather freely here, for it is quite clear that DG COMM will not advise, but rather steer, direct or even impose.

how to carry out their public or external communication (European Commission, 2016, p. 10).

Engage – As part of their role to provide a communication service, DG COMM must also supervise the implementation of a “simple, clear and understandable message” towards the media and the EU public, while also being the focal point to which they can engage back with the Commission (European Commission, 2016, p. 10).

OBJECTIVES

The entire logic of the strategic plan then flows according to these three pillars, with the objectives set out by DG COMM for the 2016-2020 period being arranged into the same three areas, as follows:

1. For the executive services, or “**Listen**”, the main objective of DG COMM is to provide support for the Commission and their Cabinets. This support comes in two ways.

Firstly, DG COMM, through its Representations in the member states and the Eurobarometer polling service, must provide a clear analysis of each country’s specificities and how to better tailor a message towards it. Aside from this, DG COMM must also provide “daily press reviews and media analysis, AV studios for live and recorded messages, support for digital communication including social media....” (European Commission, 2016). This objective is perhaps the most important one, especially when it comes to the impact it has on the policy making process of the European Commission, as the actors involved in this process must be able to tap into reliable analysis and information about the member states.

2. Related to the corporate communication, or “**Advise**”, DG COMM had not one specific objective, but four, and all of them related to improving the efficiency of the entire communication process within the European Commission, as well as the communication from the EC towards the public. The specific objectives refer to: A. The implementation of the Digital Transformation Project by 2017. B. Increased awareness of the citizens about the political priorities of the EC, especially about the “jobs, growth and investment” priority. C. All DGs of the EC exchange best practices, receive assistance on communication and “align their sectorial communications strategies/plans to the corporate messaging”. D. A more efficient use of resources “across the Commission’s communication activities” (European Commission, 2016).

3. Thirdly, in terms of the last pillar, the communication services, or **“Engage”**, DG COMM must provide the all-important link between the EC and the European citizens and must focus on three specific objectives: A. Providing a targeted connection between the Commission and the media. B. Increased awareness of the EU citizens about their rights and the EU Priorities. C. Creating platforms, such as Citizens Dialogues or social media, where citizens can directly engage with the College of Commissioners. The “Engage” objectives will be met with the help of the Representations as well as of Europe Direct.

Finally, all these objectives fall under the larger, main objective of DG COMM: “Citizens perceive that the EU is working to improve their lives and engage with the EU. They feel that their concerns are taken into consideration in European decision-making process, and they know about their rights in the EU.” (European Commission, 2016)

RESULTS

In order to analyze whether or not the Strategic Plan actually worked and fulfilled its objectives, we will take a look at the KPI’s and indicators that DG COMM provided for itself.

It is worth mentioning that, in the same manner as the role and objectives set out in the Strategic Plan and exposed above, the indicators proposed are also divided among the three pillars of services provided by the DG. However, because most of them are related to the internal communication, it’s effectiveness or satisfactory rates, related to budgetary issues or simply impossible to check as no data is available or the criteria is too vague, as for example is the case of indicator 3.1 that refers to “Tonality of media coverage towards the European Commission in media for main EU media sources”(European Commission, 2016, p.10), which does not even have an actual indicator, we will focus on the main impact indicator, which relates to the “Percentage of EU citizens having a positive image of the EU”, that is calculated using the Eurobarometer statistics.

The baseline measurement was represented by the November 2015 results presented by Eurobarometer, which indicated a 37% Positive image of the EU, a 38% Neutral opinion of the population and a 23% Negative one (European Commission, 2016, p. 14). These figures were achieved by combining the ‘Positive’ and ‘Negative’ results into groupings, thus ‘Fairly Positive’ and ‘Very Positive’ are combined into ‘Total Positive’, and the

same is true for the negative results. The target that DG COMM had to achieve by 2020 was to increase the total positive image of the EU to at least 50%.

To keep matters simple, we will use the same measurement and we will combine the results into these 3 categories. Figure 5 shows us the evolution of the image of the European Union in the eyes of its citizens throughout the last 2 decades. Quite clearly, the 2008 Economic Depression took a big toll on the EU, and European citizens drastically lost their faith in the EU during that period. A significant recovery than places us at the abovementioned figures of 2015. We see that 2016 marked a steep regression in the public image of the EU, so the plan really started on the wrong foot. By 2017 things were back at square one though, and by the end of 2019 we see a very small increase in the positive image, but a more substantial decrease in the negative one. Thus, by the end of 2019, 45% of EU citizens had a positive image of the EU, 36% of them were on the fence about this topic and 17% of them held negative views about European construction.

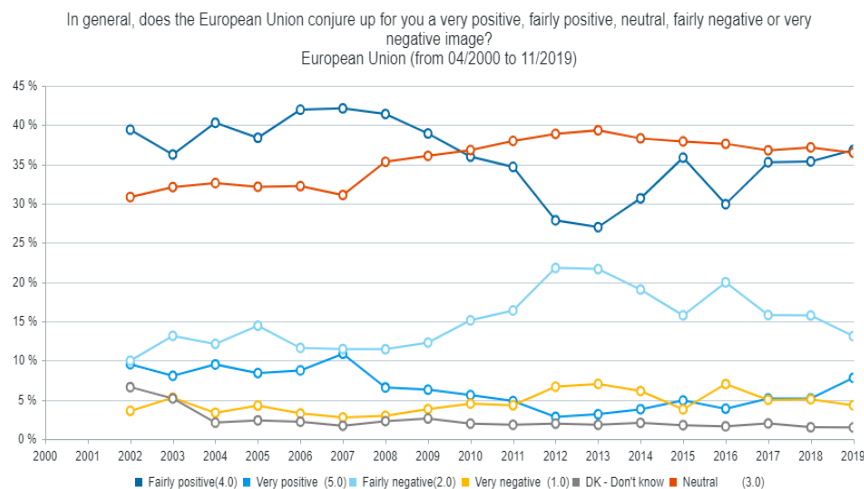


Figure 6: Evolution of the image of the European Union. Source: Eurobarometer

At a first glance, these results might look like a failure to achieve the imposed targets. And in a hard, factual way it is so. Simply put, the strategy of DG COMM failed to achieve its desired target in the timeframe in which it was supposed to do so, and there is no way to sugarcoat this fact. However, a case can be made that the target of at least 50% positive

image of the EU (or a 13% or more improvement) was truthfully impossible to achieve. I would argue that there are two main reasons why the target was simply unreachable: the very short timeframe and the external environment factors.

Firstly, a 5-year period is a reasonable one to change things in a meaningful way. However, to increase the image of a political entity by such a factor would require something of a miracle, especially given the fact that the entity itself did not change anything substantial in the way in which it functions or in the way in which it is constructed. Thus, simply from changing the strategy of communication with the public, but without changing much internally, it is a difficult task to convince people to change their minds and opinion about you. Still, there was a significant change in the image of the EU. From 37% to 45% positive views is a meaningful improvement (it is also important to note that the UK was still considered part of the EU when the last figures were polled, and the positive image of the EU inside the UK is not a very famous topic, thus an EU27 poll would very likely show even higher figures), especially given the fact that higher numbers were only recorded in the first part of the 2000's, in the high before the disastrous Economic Crisis of 2008.

Secondly, the external environmental factors must be more aptly taken into account. Even DG COMM outright states in their description of the objective that "this global indicator is influenced by many factors and externalities..." (European Commission, 2016). But it is hard to imagine that anyone in the EU even considered the possibility in November 2015, that only half a year later the UK referendum would turn out the way it did. And indeed, in 2016, we see a sharp decline in the positive image of the EU, no doubt related directly to the Brexit vote, as well as the 2016 U.S. Elections that saw the plunge of trans-Atlantic relations to new lows, and the rise of an anti-EU, anti-globalization discourse in Washington that slowly but surely made its way into Europe. Thus, the fact that the EU managed to survive and outlast this tide of nationalism and unilateralism is by itself a feat that proves the inherent resilience of the European construction, but even more, the fact that until the end of 2019 the image of the European Union improved in the minds and hearts of its citizens, even though not as much as originally planned in 2015, is a huge accomplishment.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

While we can say that until the beginning of 2020 things were looking good, or at least going on the right path, after that point it is hard to analyze anything substantial about the European Commission and its communication endeavors. That is simply because, at least until the time of writing in January 2021, the EC, either directly or through DG COMM, has not published any strategy or plan that it wants to follow in this field, nor did any actor come with any concrete actions or changes since the Von der Leyen Commission took office in December 2019. While some of the initial priorities of the new Commission hint at communication efforts, such as the “Europe fit for the digital age” priority axis, nothing concrete in terms of how the Commission communicates seem to be of high importance in the decision-making process.

In lack of a concrete plan that we can analyze and argue whether or not it follows the right trajectory, it establishes realistic targets, or even if its focus is on the correct issues, I would like to make the point for some general aspects that the EC, and in turn the entire EU, should address in their future efforts in terms of public communication.

The more physical, on-the-ground presence of the EU, and of the EC, in the member states, whether through Europe Direct, their own representations, or through other forms (such as various projects that are funded by the EU and marked as such, or other events), is certainly a positive aspect, but still one that needs further development. But perhaps what is much more important, especially in the digital world in which we live, and a digital world that shows no signs of going back to a more personal one, the EC needs a more powerful, vibrant and energetic presence in social media. Some steps have been made in this regard, and the EC is present in every member country on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram through their national representations, as well as the general account of the EC on each platform. However, their presence on these platforms is a very discreet one, and generally speaking, the content shared and posted on these accounts does not generate a significant reaction and does not reach a significant number of people.

One course of action that would much better address this huge potential that is represented by social media in terms of reaching and communicating with the public in a more personal and direct way than ever is to increase the presence on the established social media platforms.

But much more importantly it is to always be at the bleeding edge of what means social media innovations and trends. For example, this would mean that as of the beginning of 2021, it is baffling why the European Commission does not have an official presence on social media platforms such as TikTok or MeWe. Indeed, it seems that sometimes such platforms are not even worth the effort in terms of their potential, or that they are just something that kids use. But statistics as back as September 2020, put TikTok as one of the most used platforms not just in Europe, but globally. With over 11 million daily users in France, 10.7 in Germany, 9.8 million in Italy or 8.8 in Spain (Stokel-Walker, 2020), TikTok is rapidly closing the gap with the 33 million possibly reached users of Facebook in France, 28 in Germany, 31 in Italy or 21 in Spain (Kemp, 2021, p.109). This is not to make the case that one or another platform is better in any shape or form. The idea is that in order to connect, especially with the younger generation that will soon involve itself in the workings of democracy, the EC must always stay on top of the game and go where the people go. If that place is the somewhat silly platform of quick, short videos of teenagers dancing to songs or doing “challenges” then so be it. If that is how more than 10 million French or German people do every day that certainly this is a valid enough reason for the EC and the EU to be present there.

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THE CRUCIAL LINK BETWEEN CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND DDR – A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF LIBERIA AND LIBYA

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ABSTRACT: This paper aims to highlight a seemingly fundamental link between the rapidly growing concept and application of conflict resolution, and the concept of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR). Centred on a comparative methodology mainly using official documents, my thesis aims to illustrate the differences in the long-term outcome of a conflict resolution process, based on the scope and reach of DDR operations. The analysis, focused on Libya and Liberia, highlights how the two different DDR applications have contributed to the peace process, the latter successfully consolidated its security sector as opposed to the former. Thus, the conclusion of the paper addresses a key field of interest in conflict resolution theory, the maintaining of the – at times fragile – peace in a post-war environment where military groups still retain a lot of influence.

Keywords: Conflict Resolution, DDR, comparative analysis, post-war environment, peace process

INTRODUCTION

The theory of *conflict resolution* is an increasingly studied field among International Relation's scholars, and for an unquestionable and practical reason: reaching a peaceful solution in a conflict-affected nation. Nonetheless, the signing of a peace treaty might at times not be sufficient in order to secure long-lasting peaceful coexistence between all parties. It is exactly in this setting, that one of Security Sector's Reform fundamental concepts – Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR), can make an impact.

This paper aims to explore the possibility of correlating the two concepts, *conflict resolution* and *DDR*, a paper which has risen out of one key question: Is there any direct relation between successful conflict resolution and the practice of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration in a post-conflict environment? Given the insufficient amount of data, no quantitative research methods were applied to the study. On the other hand, a comparative approach coupled with a case study analysis of Libya and Liberia was assumed that would create a basis for the exploration of our hypothesis.

The study is structured in two chapters. Firstly, conflict resolution models and *DDR* are thoroughly analysed and explored, mostly from a descriptive and historical approach. Secondly, a comparative analysis of the two conflict-affected African countries, Libya and Liberia, is provided; the conflict resolution model as well as the application of *DDR* are highlighted and discussed. Last but not least, the conclusions of the study are presented.

The main limitation of the study is the lack of quantitative data, which could unmistakably support the link between the concepts analysed. Thus, the paper can only provide a « ground zero » for future research.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND DDR AS CONCEPTS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS' THEORY

Peace agreements are an essential component of conflict resolution. Without some kind of contract among the conflicting parties, it is tough to talk about conflict resolution. Nevertheless, an understanding, even if implemented, might not be adequate to build a sturdy peace. Peace demands much more than an understanding among the parties. The peace agreement is, nonetheless, an essential step for a long-lasting plan (Stedman, 2001, p. 15). Consequently, we are able to preliminarily define conflict resolution as being a scenario where conflicting people enter into an understanding which solves their central incompatibilities, accept each other's continued existence as people and also stop all brutal action against one another. This implies, of course, that conflict resolution is something that will always come after conflict. It implies that one first has to have applications and ideas for the evaluation of conflict. This is what conflict principle is about. Let us scrutinize components that are essential in this

definition. An agreement is generally a proper comprehension, a document signed under pretty much solemn conditions. Nevertheless, there could be much more casual, implicit understandings worked out between people. Such agreements might occur in secret documents, for example, an important promise made as a precondition for the structured plans, or, on the other hand, as deals which are publicly transparent. A lot of cases are prone to find out just as much dispute around the informal understandings as over the formalized documents. Moreover, such informal pacts demand considerable trust between people (Nilsson, 2009, p. 28). They are, most probably, not produced without there being a formal plan. Therefore, the structured document is essential for just about any peace process. The description discusses the people acknowledging each other's continued presence as parties. This is an essential component as it is intended to distinguish a peace agreement from an understanding of capitulation. An agreement of capitulation may be the strongest agreed expression of defeat and victory. It indicates that one side lays down arms, dissolves its military components, departs from the disputed territory and, in short, ceases to become an actor of significance and impact. A good example is a withdrawal agreement. This is an arrangement where one side agrees to take out its troops from a space of dispute and just where this is the sole issue the agreement regulates (Brahimi, 2007, p. 12).

The goal of the DDR procedure is to contribute to stability and security in post-conflict environments so that development and recovery could start. The DDR of former combatants is an intricate process, security, military, with political, socio-economic, and humanitarian dimensions. It seeks to cope with the post-conflict security issue which occurs when former combatants remain with no livelihoods or maybe support networks, apart from their former comrades, during the essential transition period from struggle to development and peace. By way of a procedure for eliminating weapons from the hands of combatants, moving the combatants from military hierarchies and supporting them to become socially and economically incorporated into modern society, DDR seeks to help ex combatants to enable them to get active participants in the peace process. In this regard, DDR lays the groundwork for protecting and sustaining the communities where these people are able to live as law abiding citizens, while creating national capacity for long-range peace, development and protection. It is important to be aware that DDR alone

cannot resolve conflict or even reduce violence; nonetheless, it is able to help build a protected setting so that other components of a recovery and peace building strategy are able to proceed (Youssef, 2017, p.2).

Disarmament is the collection, documentation, disposal and control of little arms, ammunition, explosives, and heavy and light weapons of combatants and usually also of the civilian population. Disarmament comes with the improvement of responsible arms management programmes. Demobilization is understood as the formal discharge of combatants from state owned armed forces or other armed groups. The very first phase of demobilization may perhaps expand from the processing of specific combatants in transient centres to the massing of soldiers in camps specified for this function (cantonment sites, encampments, assembly areas or maybe barracks). The next phase of demobilization entails the support package offered towards the demobilized, known as reinsertion. Reinsertion is the help provided to ex combatants during demobilization but before the longer-term process of reintegration. Reinsertion is a kind of transitional guidance to help protect the basic requirements of ex combatants and their families and may include transitional safety allowances, training, short-term education, medical services, shelter, clothes, food, tools, and employment. While reintegration is a long-term, continuous, social and financial process of development, reinsertion is a short-term material and/or maybe financial support to meet immediate needs and can easily keep going as much as one year (Lamb, 2008, p. 4). Reintegration is the procedure by which ex combatants acquire civilian status and get sustainable earnings and work. Reintegration is basically an economic and social practice with an open time frame, mainly happening in communities at the regional level. It is an element of the common advancement of a nation along with a national responsibility, as it oftentimes necessitates long-term outside assistance (Muggah, 2015, p. 3).

The achievement of programmes which connect to disarmament, reintegration and also demobilisation (DDR) of former combatants into civilian life depends on four vital aspects. For starters, it is crucial that there is comprehensive and insightful planning, based on sound analysis and research in order for a practical technique to be developed. Next, it is vital that the requisite political exist at all levels to carry out this particular strategy effectively and efficiently. Last, these programmes are time-consuming and expensive typical tasks, and thus the required resources,

material and financial assistance, along with technical expertise, have been anchored. Thus, it is essential that efficient evaluation and monitoring methods be included in DDR processes, methods which are a major component of the implementation strategy (UN DDR Center, 2019, p. 13).

Since the late 1980s, the United Nations (UN) has frequently been called upon to help support the implementation of disarmament, reintegration and also demobilization (DDR) programmes in countries emerging from conflict. In a peacekeeping context, this pattern was part of a move towards complicated operations which seek to cope with a multitude of problems ranging from protection of human rights, the rule of law, fair elections and sound financial governance, rather than compared to conventional peacekeeping in which two warring people have been divided by a ceasefire line patrolled by blue helmeted soldiers. (UN DDR Center, 2021).

MODELS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

There can be found two kinds of styles, pacific and coercive short of war. Among the pacific methods we could distinguish between two approaches: mediation – a process by which, additionally to providing excellent offices, a third party participates actively in the negotiations (Wallensteen, 2002, p. 214). It attempts to reconcile the other statements and also to appease mutual resentments produced by the contending parties. The mediator may not force the unique option of its own on the dispute, but he/she is likely to carry a good first step in proposing formulas. Within the first meeting of the very first Hague Peace Conference of 1899, the performance of a mediator was declared to be that of reconciling the opposing claims and also of appeasing the feelings of resentment which might have arisen between the states at variance (Sikander, 2011, p. 157). Most of the present-day international conflicts have a single or even more mediating parties working on a regular basis to solve the conflict using means other than violence; we then have judicial methods, via arbitration – among probably the oldest techniques utilized by western countries to settle overseas disputes. It involves the referral of the dispute or conflict between states, to a third party, easily chosen by the people, tasked with providing an outcome to the situation. If both sides agree ahead of time to abide by a solution proposed by a mediator, the procedure is known as arbitration, or adjudication – through which international conflicts will be

settled by a properly constituted international judicial tribunal using rules of law. The one basic organ of judicial settlement at present obtainable in the global community will be the International Court of Justice in The Hague, which succeeded in preserving continuity with the Permanent Court of International Justice (Sousa, 2018, p. 32.).

The court really should determine the case(s) on the foundation of international law, and jurisdiction often stretches only to legal problems; diplomacy - referred to as the procedure of doing communication among states through officially recognized representatives. The interaction is just about constant among states as their representatives or diplomats protect state interests and reduce conflict. Diplomacy has an instrumental worth in the settlement of certain conflicts. States may perhaps prosecute their differences and also intensify the conflicts in which they are involved by a fantastic assortment of strategies, but tensions between them are most properly managed and also reduced through diplomatic means. Diplomatic ways of handling conflict may be attempted through direct negotiations, mediation, good offices, conciliation, and inquiry. These various kinds of diplomacy are much less structured than either judicial settlement or perhaps arbitration. If the people to a worldwide dispute are willing to talk about their differences instead of threatening each other or perhaps to fight about them, they are going to resort to negotiations as a way of settlement (Wanis, 2014, p. 57). Direct negotiations usually take the shape of multilateral or bilateral diplomacy. Such negotiations could be performed between heads of American states, straight through ambassadors along with other accredited diplomats of the concerned people and through a worldwide convention. (Sikander, 2011, p. 158)

THE APPLICATION OF DDR IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED AFRICAN COUNTRIES

The Case of Libya

On the Libyan scene, the effort at peace building was inconceivable since it had been predicated on consolidating the interests, views, prerogatives and prejudices of the 'victors' to the exclusion of the losers. Generally, there was just one, monolithic 'desired peace' that excluded some potential or real rival counterparts whose representatives were often murdered, in jail or maybe somewhere else in exile. Thus, the goal of attaining an extensive and reasonably just peace deal was ruled out,

especially given that the victorious ‘rebels’, their transitional body along with their foreign backers left zero space to confess the importance of knowing the disenfranchised components of the other ‘side’ and had been altogether disinterested in along with them in posts or maybe a peace settlement (Jebnoun, 2015, p. 847).

Once unified in their fight against Gaddafi, Libya’s militias have shown to be unprepared to disarm, demobilize or maybe to be incorporated into the ranks of a national state army or any other protection institutions. Islamist militias especially have been keen on keeping their military and organizational capacity intact to further their own agenda (Gaub, 2014, pp. 110-111). The upshot of the issue is the growth of an interesting and unusual army and security ‘balance’, whereas militias have had the advantage while the nascent state has lacked any extraordinary control over military pressure and has long been required to depend on semi-co-opted militias, eventually became hostage to them and also their independent and diverse agendas. The security institutions which have been built in the Gaddafi era emerged dilapidated as well as in disarray after his ousting. To be able to be rehabilitated or even converted into practical structures, they call for enough interest within an inclusive process of reform plus overhaul. Today, all efforts at DDR and SSR have verified poorly developed and also ill-starred, despite serious funding, which sadly resulted in squandering and corruption of public information, inflicting additional destruction of the perceived rationale for plus appeal of DDR. Even many militia members that joined the newly developed organs of the LSF or SSC rarely see themselves as representing the Libyan state and answer and then their very own commanders. Along with their inner feuds, their power structure remains diffuse, lacking distinct chains of command, unreliable and beyond any state control. In the long run, they have just done harm to its legitimacy and power. Attempts at DDR and SSR have endured the lack of an integrated and overarching conceptualization, just developing in an *ad hoc* manner (Youssef, 2017, p. 6).

As outlined by several writers, Libya now faces what might well be called a ‘catch-22’ situation whereby the dissolution of the militias cannot be attained until the nation possesses a single national army equipped to function and even do their duties, with the ‘catch’ being that such an objective may well not be discovered and realizable until such a period and once the armed groups are demobilized (Youssef, 2017, pp. 6-7).

The main challenge and issue was that the Libyan DDR program was politically manipulated and also quickly faced corruption scandals - arising, in part, from a shortage of transparency. Islamist, regional and tribal formations became actively involved in providing for the nascent programme with false info which would facilitate the channelling of money for their respective constituencies (Yousef, 2012, p. 13). Thus, the program fell into using as something for appropriating public money and as an approach for accessing job, scholarships, and training opportunities it held out to former combatants. The programme was beset with claimants providing falsified information which resulted in the addition of even those with criminal records or even people who joined militias that really had no job in the battle against the Gaddafi regime but people who had mushroomed - opportunistically - after its fall. Considerably, the programme additionally lacked some dependable, clear cut mechanism for identifying exactly how a certain criterion should be applied since there was no useful approach commensurate with matching the socio-economic profile of people that claimed former combatant status (Yousef, 2017, p. 8).

The case of Liberia

As of August 2007, approximately 66,000 out of the 101,874 demobilized fighters had completed or had been taking part in instructional programmes and training funded under the UNDP managed "Trust Fund" and also through bilateral arrangements. Although the implementation of the rehabilitation component was postponed because of financial limitations, recent reports suggest that the majority of the money necessary to discuss the reintegration bills of the remaining 35,000 fighters is mobilized. Unfortunately, there is simply no record to show the entire quantity earmarked for this system. Based on NCDDRR sources, about US\$ 71 million was raised for all the programmes, from that nearly US\$70 million have been used. (Bosede, 2012, p.34)

Besides the March 2006 UNDP survey of ex combatants cited above, UNMIL conducted an additional, similar research in September and August 2006. The survey targeted to evaluate the encounters and perceptions of ex combatants that had participated in the reintegration and rehabilitation plan. The UNMIL survey discovered that there is just a marginal impact on the socioeconomic circumstances of the two organizations. With regards to acceptance by society, 93% of the ex-

combatants stated they had been accepted by their neighbours with no difficulty. Overall, 73% believed the community looked at them with acceptance. Ex-combatants that had finished the RR programs perceived greater acceptance from the communities in comparison with people who had not. Of the ex-combatants that had participated in the RR programs, just 4% thought their towns looked at them with fear (Jaye, 2009, p. 11).

Most recently, in 2007, UNMIL, a selection of UN agencies, USAID and others conducted an evaluation objective over the DDRR process in Liberia. According to a declaration in the Fifteenth Progress Report of the Secretary General within the United Nations Mission in Liberia, many Liberians informed the quest that “the reintegration program did not offer renewable alternative livelihoods for ex combatants”. Liberia’s example shows us that the DDRR procedure reduces the chances of relapse to violence, though it does not eliminate all threats to the protection of the state as well as the people. The political and socio-economic circumstance in post-conflict Liberia also had an influence on the reintegration and rehabilitation of ex fighters (Security Council, 2007, pp. 4-6).

CONCLUSIONS

The two analysed countries have witnessed different models of both conflict resolution strategy, as well as DDR application. Throughout the decades following the implementation of Security Sector Reform policies, with a specific and detailed highlight on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, the study has provided a comparison of an arguably successful DDR in Liberia, and a case of public policy failure in Libya.

The principal conclusion that the study has provided is the idea that DDR can provide a substantial impact on the long-term success of a peaceful coexistence of all parties, in the aftermath of a conflict. Considering the main limitation of the study – that it has unfortunately a fully qualitative nature – we are confident to acknowledge that the hypothesis that has been established through this study can be the basis of future extensive research for the scholars interested in the field of Security Sector Reform as well as those interested in the peaceful resolution of international, intranational, or civil conflicts.

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THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING MECHANISM AND OPERATIONS

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ABSTRACT: The COVID-19 pandemic had an unprecedented impact over the international relations because it limited the direct contact between political actors as a result of the measures taken for combating the spread of the coronavirus. This had a direct influence over the United Nations Organization who was and is limited in operating as it did in the past years. Especially affected were the peacekeeping operations, and the mechanism at a broader level, which had to pursue the fulfillment of their mandate even in these hard times. The purpose of the present paper is to examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic over the peacekeeping mechanism and operations, how the organization responded to these new challenges, how the missions adapted to them and what prospects we should expect in the future from peacekeeping as a result of this impact along with previous challenges to the mechanism.

Keywords: COVID-19; United Nations; peacekeeping; Security Council.

INTRODUCTION

In the previous decade, the United Nations peacekeeping mechanism suffered a series of challenges to its capacity to protect and preserve international peace and security. The past years have witnessed the growing unwillingness of states to further support the multilateral agenda of the UN, which has led to a more unilateral approach to international relations by the member states, the reduction of the financial support for the organization and the critics that have characterized the peacekeeping mechanism for its lack of success. 2020 continued this trend since the COVID-19 pandemic has also posed a great threat to the peacekeeping

mechanism as it has shown prospects of limiting the capacity of operations to successfully fulfill the mandate they had been authorized.

The purpose of this article is to examine the impacts of the pandemic over the peacekeeping mechanism and over some of its operations, how the UN adapted to it, what decision it took, how the mechanism has changed and what prospects we should expect from peacekeeping in the future. The first part of the article is intended to present the context of the study and the importance of it and the methodology used in order to analyze the materials collected. The second part will present some general facts about the current situation of the United Nations peacekeeping mechanism with the limitations and challenges it faces. Afterwards, in the third part, the article will analyze the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic over the peacekeeping mechanism and operations and will detail what measures were taken by the UN in order to fight against the challenges posed by the pandemic. Finally, the article will present what prospects this period has for the future of the UN peacekeeping and what will probably be the organization's answer to those challenges.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ARTICLE, METHODOLOGY USED AND SOURCES

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic over international relations and over the United Nations has been studied before, conclusions being made that the pandemic is a new variable that has to be taken into account when one is thinking about the behaviour of states³⁴, that it would encourage the positions of populist agendas³⁵ or that restrictions altered the liberal conceptions³⁶. The subject of the COVID-19 influence over peacekeeping has been treated already, authors arguing that the pandemic has a great impact over the peacekeeping operations as they are limited in

³⁴ See, for example, Kim Yi Dionne, Fulya Felicity Turkmen, "The Politics of Pandemic Othering: Putting COVID-19 in Global and Historical Context", in *International Organization*, no. 74, S1, December 2020, pp. 213-230.

³⁵ Jon C.W. Pevehouse, "The COVID-19 Pandemic, International Cooperation, and Populism", in *International Organization*, no. 74, S1, December 2020, pp. 191-212.

³⁶ Sheena Chestnut Greitens, "Surveillance, Security, and Liberal Democracy in the Post-COVID World", in *International Organization*, no. 74, S1, December 2020, pp. 169-190.

behaving with local communities³⁷, that the virus is a challenge for the mechanism as it endangers the peace process³⁸ and that it also offers the opportunity for peacekeeping to reform and better reintegrate in the present international system³⁹. The importance of the study is that it threatens the impact of the pandemic taking into consideration all perspectives offered by other authors before and argues that COVID-19 is both a threat to the peacekeeping mechanism, even more when it is taken into consideration with the other challenges of the peacekeeping mechanism, but also a moving variable that may determine both the Security Council's members and the organization, at a broader level, to reform the mechanism. Moreover, the study aims to underline the most probable future of the UN peacekeeping mechanism and how the operations are going to be affected by the pandemic.

In order to answer these questions, the following methodology has been used. Through comparative analysis, it was possible to compare the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic as opposed to the previous ones, as this way, the impacts of the pandemic would be easily identified and understood. Institutional analysis has also been used in order to comprehend how the UN mechanism adapted to the pandemic, how it responded to it and what measures it took in order to limit the impact of the restrictions and to further adapt its operations to these new variables. The article also appealed to functional analysis, through which one could better understand the changes of the UN during the pandemic, how it affected the functioning of the organization and of the operations, how they adapted to it and what prospects the current situation has for the future of peacekeeping. Regarding the sources of the study, these are constituted, mainly, from secondary sources, articles and publications, which have analyzed the United Nations and the peacekeeping mechanism during the pandemic. However, the study has also made use of primary sources,

³⁷ Namie Di Razza, *UN Peacekeeping and the Protection of Civilians in the COVID-19 Era*, 22 May 2020, available at <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2020/05/un-peacekeeping-protection-of-civilians-in-covid-19-era/>, accessed on 4 March 2021.

³⁸ Juan Alberto Rial, *COVID-19: A new challenge for the UN for peacekeeping*, available at <https://cepei.org/en/documents/covid-19-a-new-challenge-for-the-un-for-peacekeeping/>, accessed on 5 March 2021.

³⁹ Charles T. Hunt, Adam Day, *Why COVID-19 offers a chance to transform UN peacekeeping*, 28 May 2020, <https://theconversation.com/why-covid-19-offers-a-chance-to-transform-un-peacekeeping-139416>, accessed on 5 March 2021.

official documents of the UN in its fight against the pandemic, such as instructions to the missions, statistics and declarations.

THE PRESENT UN SITUATION AND LIMITATIONS

The context of the UN peacekeeping in which the COVID-19 pandemic occurred couldn't have been more disadvantageous for the organization. The last decade witnessed a loss of interest in the UN peacekeeping operations, as only six new operations were authorized, and from 2014 no other important one⁴⁰. Therefore, the number of peacekeepers mobilized to fulfill the UN mandates was lower than in previous periods of the UN. As of January 2021, only 80,000 peacekeepers have been deployed in 13 active UN missions compared to over 107,000 troops in January 2016⁴¹. The reasons for these recent developments are diverse and are not related particularly to COVID-19. More exactly, the previous decade has shown a loss of trust in the peacekeeping mechanism for various reasons. First, we have the ones which are related to the UN, such as the host countries' reluctance to allow interventions in their country, because of some previous experiences, such as the 2010 Haiti episode when a UN mission spread cholera locally which led to over 8,000 people dead⁴²; the accusations of sexual abuses made against UN operations in Africa, particularly against the operation authorized in the Central African Republic⁴³, and the growing unhappiness over the ineffectiveness of the UN peacekeeping operations.

⁴⁰ There is an operation authorized from 2017 to 2019 in Haiti, the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti, but it is a continuation of the one already authorized in Haiti from 2004 to 2017, the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). UN document, *List of Peacekeeping Operations 1948 – 2020*, available at https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/un_peacekeeping_operation_list_3_2.pdf, accessed on 6 March 2021.

⁴¹ UN document, *Monthly Summary of Military and Police Contribution to United Nations Operations* (2015-2020), available at https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/0_front_page_msr_december_2020.pdf, accessed on 6 March 2021.

⁴² For a comprehensive study of this episode see Mara Pillinger, Ian Hurd and Michael N. Barnett, "How to Get Away with Cholera: The UN, Haiti, and International Law", in *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 14, Issue 1, March 2016, pp. 70-86.

⁴³ See Elijah Mwasi Mwanyika, "Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by Intervention Forces in Central African Republic", in *African Journal of Empirical Research*, vol. 2, issue 1, 2021, pp. 63-78.

Additionally, there are other reasons which are not particularly UN-related but also have a great influence over the organization and peacekeeping. Here we have the international agendas pursued by the big powers which have witnessed a growing interest in pursuing unilateral or bilateral actions without the UN implication and, especially, the nationalist perspectives which encourages the unwillingness to cooperate at a multilateral level and the demotivation to contribute at an international level⁴⁴. This could be identified in the few numbers of troops sent by four of the five permanent members of the Security Council, more exactly the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Russia, which, together, had mobilized only over 1,200 peacekeepers in January 2021. Comparatively, China contributed with over 2,400 troops⁴⁵. Another reason is the financial problem that the organization is currently facing, which constitutes a great barrier for the United Nations at a broader level, the budget of the organization having been limited and cut in the past years. In January 2019, it was estimated that the UN Peacekeeping faced a reduction of funds of over \$2 billion⁴⁶, and during the pandemic this reduction was estimated at \$6 billion⁴⁷. This has a direct impact over peacekeeping, as the UN has been and still is discouraged in organizing multidimensional operations as it has been in the last two decades. Another relevant reason is the lack of response to the calls from the states for continuing their contribution to the UN, and, as a consequence, peacekeeping continues to be placed under question.

In general, this has been the UN peacekeeping context in which the COVID-19 pandemic is occurring. Timing couldn't be perfect, as these recent developments together with the pandemic could represent a threat to the future of peacekeeping operations. However, as it will be presented, COVID-19 could be an opportunity for the peacekeeping mechanism to

⁴⁴ Han Dorussen, "Peacekeeping after COVID-19", in *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy*, vol. 26, issue 3, 2020, pp. 2-4.

⁴⁵ UN document, *Contributors to UN Peacekeeping Operations by Country and Post Police, UN Military Experts on Mission, Staff Officers and Troops*, available at https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/01_summary_of_contributions_34_jan2021.pdf, accessed on 6 March 2021.

⁴⁶ <https://www.undispatch.com/un-peacekeeping-faces-massive-funding-shortfall/>, accessed on 6 March 2021.

⁴⁷ Richard Gowan, Louise Riis Andersen, *Peacekeeping in the Shadow of Covid-19 Era*, June 2020, available at <https://www.diis.dk/en/research/peacekeeping-in-the-shadow-of-covid-19-era>, accessed on 7 March 2021.

adapt and overcome these limits, as the organization did at the beginning of the Cold War, when the UN Charter and the security mechanism were similarly limited and blocked by the confrontation of the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union.

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic was officially declared on the 11th of March 2020, while the UN had 13 active operations authorized, from which seven were deployed on the African continent. Bearing in mind the experience of the Ebola outbreak in Africa, the peacekeeping operations had the possibility to better act and respond to the pandemic⁴⁸. As coronavirus cases rapidly spread across the continents and affected the life of the civilians as well as of the peacekeepers, who were limited in fulfilling their task of protecting local communities, the UN took a series of actions through which it intended to limit the impact of COVID-19 over its operations. In these circumstances, the following objectives were central for the UN after the start of the pandemic: supporting local efforts in the fight against the spread of the coronavirus, keeping UN personnel safe, assuring the continuation of the peacekeepers work, fulfilling mandates and supporting peace and conflict containment⁴⁹. Rapidly after the declaration of the pandemic, the UN prepared its peacekeeping operations in order to prevent a Haiti episode and postponed any rotation of troops until the 30th of June 2020⁵⁰. Currently, rotations have resumed but special measures have been taken in order to prevent the spread of the virus⁵¹.

⁴⁸ For a case study on UNMIL response to the Ebola outbreak see Sara. E Davies, Simon Rushton, "Public health emergencies: a new peacekeeping mission? Insights from UNMIL's role in the Liberia Ebola outbreak", in *Third World Quarterly*, no. 37, issue 3, March 2020, pp. 419-435.

⁴⁹ Atul Khare, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, *Covid-19 and Fragile Countries: UN Peacekeepers Must Stay the Course*, 29 May 2020, available at <https://www.ispionline.it/it/publicazione/covid-19-and-fragile-countries-un-peacekeepers-must-stay-course-26374>, accessed on 7 March 2021.

⁵⁰ UN document, *Impact of Covid-19 on UN Peacekeeping*, available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/impact-of-covid-19-un-peacekeeping>, accessed on 7 March 2021.

⁵¹ COVID-19 Crisis an Opportunity to "Rethink and Develop UN Peacekeeping Further", 7 October 2020, available at <https://www.ipinst.org/2020/10/un-peace-ops-during-covid-19-high-level-dialogue#2>, accessed on 7 March 2021.

Besides the above-mentioned measures, the UN introduced a series of protocols and actions which peacekeepers had to follow in order to contain and prevent the spread of the virus, such measures were: the limitation of pre-pandemic activities – such as daily patrolling, training local police, direct connection with local communities – to core ones; the practice of social distancing among peacekeepers and the local community, and work from home activities; and hygiene measures, such as systematic handwashing and temperature checks at the entrance of UN bases⁵².

Because the UN missions are focused on protecting civilians, and the COVID-19 pandemic poses a direct threat to the life of the citizens, the operations also introduced a series of activities which helped the host states in their fight against the virus, such activities were: conducting public education campaigns about the virus; instituting new health and safety protocols inside operations bases and in local communities; protecting vulnerable groups and assuring their equal access to medical facilities⁵³. They also supported local governments' responses to the pandemic in different ways, such as: information campaigns about the virus on the radio, WhatsApp groups, social media, posters, flashcards – with the purpose of informing the local communities of the threat of the pandemic and how to protect themselves, with a special focus on vulnerable groups⁵⁴; the assumption of responsibility in facilitating and securing basic services, such as the maintaining of public order or delivering food; promoting and protecting public health initiatives by the WHO and NGOs; sustaining peace processes and political negotiations by offering political help and mediation support among political actors⁵⁵. Some operations went even further and distributed health equipment to host states, such as masks, sanitizers, ventilators⁵⁶, and so on.

⁵² Cedric de Coning, *The Impact of COVID-19 on Peace Operations*, April 2020, available at <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2020/04/impact-covid-19-peace-operations/>, accessed on 8 March 2021.

⁵³ Amanda M. Makosso, "United Nations Peacekeeping Operations In The Era Of Covid-19", in *The Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare*, vol. 3, issue 2, 2020, pp. 8-10.

⁵⁴ *Peacekeeping Community Outreach and COVID-19*, available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/peacekeeping-community-outreach-and-covid-19>, accessed on 9 March 2021.

⁵⁵ Richard Gowan, Louise Riis Andersen, "Peacekeeping in the Shadow of COVID-19 Era", p. 3.

⁵⁶ <https://unifil.unmissions.org/italian-peacekeepers-donate-ventilators-tyre-hospitals>, accessed on 9 March 2021.

This proved to be an efficient way of dealing with the virus, as the Haiti episode did not replicate, and the peacekeeping missions had the possibility to pursue their mandate and obtain some successes during the pandemic. For example, in Congo, peacekeepers collaborated with the national army and repelled an attack against an armed group who abducted 38 civilians. In Mali, the peacekeeping mission provided logistic and operational support for legislative elections to take place. In Somalia, the UN assured that terrorist groups did not make use of the opportunity to strike during the pandemic, and, moreover, the operation collaborated with the African Union soldiers and the local government to develop their own COVID-19 response plans⁵⁷.

Despite the actions taken by the UN, the COVID-19 can be seen as a potential threat to the current peacekeeping mechanism as it confirms the past years trends. These are, as stated above, the mistrust in the UN system, the unilateral agenda of the main powers, the reluctance of host states to accept a UN intervention and the organization's lack of resources. As a result, in 2020, despite the UN Secretary General Guterres' call for a "global ceasefire", the conflicts persisted during the pandemic and peacekeepers were involved in a series of conflicts in various regions. Many, including the UN Secretary General, thought that a greater threat to the well-being of all communities would put an end to frictions and that the pandemic would facilitate peace dialogues. This was partly true, but in some regions, such as Yemen, Libya, Syria and so on, fights between political parties continued and many people suffered from it. The local peacekeeping operations had to deal with these conflicts and with the challenge posed by the pandemic while facing serious financial problems which limited their response. Recently, 20 peacekeepers were injured in Mali after an attack over the UN base⁵⁸, a peacekeeper attached to the Central African Republic mission died in an attack⁵⁹, and three people were killed in Congo after an attack over a UN convoy, including the Italian ambassador to the country⁶⁰.

⁵⁷ Atul Khare, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, *Covid-19 and Fragile Countries: UN Peacekeepers Must Stay the Course*, available at <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/covid-19-and-fragile-countries-un-peacekeepers-must-stay-course-26374>, accessed on 9 March 2021.

⁵⁸ Mali: Around 20 UN peacekeepers injured in major attack on MINUSMA base, 10 February 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/02/1084342>, accessed on 10 March 2021.

⁵⁹ Peacekeeper killed in 'heinous attacks' in Central African Republic, 13 January 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/01/1082022>, accessed on 10 March 2021.

⁶⁰ Three killed in attack on UN World Food Programme convoy in DR Congo, 22 February 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/02/1085352>, accessed on 10 March 2021.

These recent developments confirm the vital role played by the peacekeeping missions in the war-torn regions. Some, including the Under-Secretary-General of The UN Department of Operational Support, Atul Khare, and the Under-Secretary-General of The UN Department of Peace Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix⁶¹, argue that the conflicts would multiply in the coming period as the pandemic and the financial problems limit the possibility of the UN and the international community to answer. Therefore, a growing spiral can be identified: the pandemic challenges and limits the responses of local governments to acts of violence by opposition parties, thus, the conflicts multiply, which makes the local government request special aid from the UN missions. However, the missions are limited in their response and can only respond to acts of violence and not fully prevent them from happening.

Therefore, the pandemic does not have a direct or a great impact over the activities and mandates of the peacekeeping missions, as fights and wars continue even during the pandemic. As it will be argued below, its influence over the global economy could pose a serious threat to the mechanism instead. Currently, the UN is somehow in the middle, from authorizing multidimensional operations, which could protect and preserve international peace and security, help states consolidate their power and prevent human rights violations, to limited operations, particularly focused on political matters, as it will be presented below.

PROSPECTS OF THE UN PEACEKEEPING

The combination of the pandemic with the expected global economic recession is currently the main threat to the peacekeeping mechanism. This could influence the organization to switch its focus from conflicts to the economic and social variables of disputes, which would ultimately lead to the preservation of international peace⁶². The 2018 Action for Peacekeeping could explain the future development of the UN peacekeeping mechanism. The document emphasizes the importance of smaller specialized UN

⁶¹ Atul Khare, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, *Covid-19 and Fragile Countries: UN Peacekeepers Must Stay the Course*.

⁶² Charles T. Hunt, Adam Day, *Why COVID-19 offers a chance to transform UN peacekeeping*.

missions⁶³, especially political ones, which could find solutions for and bring support to political problems currently faced by some states, or medical ones, in the context of the pandemic. The benefits of these smaller missions are identified in the few costs which are needed in order to authorize and make an operation fully functional, as well as the easy deployment, while the operations, not being authorized on Chapter VII of the UN Charter⁶⁴, would not provoke a negative reaction from some of the Security Council's permanent members. However, those kinds of missions also have their weaknesses, such as the failure to prevent conflicts, to protect civilians, as well as the failure to impose a resolution of the Council, lacking the power of Chapter VII, particularly of articles 41-42. In the context of the pandemic, it is likely that the Security Council will seek such lower size missions to fulfil a mandate, instead of the multidimensional ones we have been used to. This is also confirmed by the "institutional strengths" of the UN, which could make use of its mediation as well as its civilian and political capacities to facilitate peace processes, of its solid logistic and administrative structures, which could further support interventions, and of specialized technical expertise, which could encourage more specialized operations to deal with specific topics⁶⁵. Such a mission has already been authorized in Guinea-Bissau, which was centred

⁶³ UN Document, *Action for Peacekeeping: Declaration of Shared Commitments on UN Peacekeeping Operations*, available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/a4p-declaration-en.pdf>, accessed on 11 March 2021.

⁶⁴ Chapter VII contains articles 39 to 51 and provides two different scenarios through which it can solve interstate disparities. Before deciding on a resolution, article 39 offers the Security Council a way to investigate the situation before deciding future actions. Through article 40, the Council has the possibility to propose a series of actions which can prevent the escalation of the existing situation and to facilitate the peace process. If the previous article cannot be applied, the next one, article 41, offers the Council the possibility to initiate a series of non-military actions which can determine the observation of the already given resolutions. Article 42 authorizes the Security Council to use military action in order to assure the respect of the given recommendations in order to protect and maintain international peace and security.

⁶⁵ Louise Riis Andersen, Richard Gowan, *How the U.N. Can Mitigate the Coronavirus Pandemic's Impact on Peacekeeping*, 6 July 2020, available at <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/28890/how-the-u-n-can-mitigate-the-coronavirus-pandemic-s-impact-on-peacekeeping>, accessed 11 March 2021.

on peacebuilding⁶⁶, and in Haiti, where a political mission is currently supporting the local community⁶⁷.

Consequently, the current prospect of the future of the UN peacekeeping missions is that the current authorized missions would mostly be kept deployed in the countries that most need them, and, in the context of new challenges, it will be expected to adapt and handle them with the existing resources. However, there is also the possibility for the international community to acknowledge the importance of the peacekeeping mechanism and fund its activities. Therefore, states, international organizations and NGOs could come together in the fight against the pandemic and show solidarity to the most affected states⁶⁸. However, in the current situation, it is most likely that the Security Council will either instruct the already authorized operations to fulfil other obligations, or it will authorize smaller missions to complete such mandates.

CONCLUSIONS

The COVID-19 impact over the peacekeeping mechanism can be seen as a confirmation of the trend of the past years. It is not a variable that would alone pose a threat to the UN, but rather combined with the pre-existing ones it would have a greater impact. Arguably, the peacekeeping mechanism is currently facing a combined threat constituted from the unilateral agendas pursued by states, the growing unhappiness with UN missions' lack of success, the financial problems and the threat posed by the pandemic. On the other hand, the pandemic could be seen as a moving variable which would continue the Action for Peacekeeping proposal and further reform the peacekeeping mechanism, shifting the view of the Security Council to the current economic and social problems – such as climate change. Therefore, what we should expect in the future from the

⁶⁶ The operation was withdrawn on 31 December 2020 as it completed its mandate. More details available at <https://uniogbis.unmissions.org/en>, accessed on 11 March 2021.

⁶⁷For more details check the official website of the operation: <https://binuh.unmissions.org/en>

⁶⁸ Tom Buitelaar, David den Dunnen and Diego Salama, *The impact of the corona virus on UN peacekeeping at the field, state, and global level*, 15 June 2020, available at <https://www.thehagueuniversity.com/about-thuas/thuas-today/news/detail/2020/06/15/the-impact-of-the-corona-virus-on-un-peacekeeping-at-the-field-state-and-global-level>, accessed 11 March 2021.

mechanism is the authorization of no new multidimensional operations, but rather a continuation of the ones already authorized and the possibility of smaller operations, which would deal with specified tasks.

The article has tried to present and analyze the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic over the peacekeeping mechanism, the way the UN has adapted to this new challenge and what prospects are expected from these recent developments. However, the limits of this article are given by the fact that it has not analyzed the way in which the UN and its peacekeeping missions are dealing with the vaccine campaigns in the states in which they are authorized, it has not taken into consideration the position of Security Council member states and it has not presented how peacekeepers were affected by these challenges. Therefore, the research on the subject could be further expanded by answering these questions and by examining how the vaccine has influenced the situation locally, answers which could be easily found in the future as more examples would be identified.

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THE FIRST 2020 PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE: TRUMP VS. BIDEN. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT: History has taught humanity that those who mastered the art of communication were able to trigger major events that contributed to the way our world is shaped today. This paper analyses the first presidential debate between Joe Biden and Donald Trump, focusing on the specific issues of communication, strategies and tactics used and presents a parallel analysis of the transmitted messages of the participants, prominence given to Trump's and Biden's common grounds and the contradictory interests exposed by the parties. The reader can thus, observe the character traits emerged through the communication strategies used by the two politicians, the various levels and dimensions of discourse, as well as how the communication strategy of the two is based on their main features.

Keywords: Donald Trump; Joe Biden; presidential debate; discourse analysis; U.S. elections.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is man's most fundamental power, a form of art that can be used for both peaceful and belligerent purposes - the ability through which individuals convey feelings, thoughts, desires, or expectations to each other. In terms of impact, it functions as an element whose dimensions can create new relationships or strengthen the existing ones, whether in individuals or even in a whole nation. From Cicero's *Catilinarians*, Alexander the Great's famous speeches to the Martin Luther King's notorious "*I have a dream*", amongst it is mandatory to be mentioned at least Nelson Mandela's "*I am Prepared to Die*", Winston Churchill's "*Never Give*

In", Emmeline Pankhurst's "*Freedom or Death*" and Mahatma Gandhi's "*Quit India*" speech, the words of those mentioned above successfully withstood the test of time. A common element that those mentioned share is the ability to maintain a firm position while delivering a clean, clear discourse, being aware of the tonality and the importance of each word spoken, proving that they can genuinely master the art of communication. This triggered major events that contributed to the way our world is shaped today. What resembles them, in spite of their diverse professions, is the ability to convey the information, the emotion or the mood needed to achieve the purpose of the speech. Reflecting upon their biographies, we can notice that the elements that placed them on the pedestal of respect and recognition were precisely their communication skills, together with the aptitudes derived from their vocations. The contemporary society has learned the lessons of the past and understood the complexity of this ability that distinguishes us as a species, therefore the one who masters the techniques of communication can design tactics and implement strategies through which he or she may achieve the desired success. Certainly, no human can enjoy the notoriety, visibility and influence that one of *the most powerful man on the planet* has. History has taught us that a single, well-spoken word can start a war or bring peace, destabilize economies, rebuild nation-to-nation relations or strengthen agreements. It is mandatory for the one who is occupying the chair in the Oval Office to master the communication techniques and speaking strategies that make one an impeccable orator.

The atypical context of our days caused by the global pandemic that all countries are trying to fight against has increased the dependence on the communication channels (social media, TV, radio, internet etc.). The cautiousness about the quality and structure when transmitting a message being now more noticeable than ever is a result of modern technology combined with the limits imposed by the health measures in use. Given this context, the two candidates for the Washington presidency had no choice but to adapt their communication style with the ones eligible to vote in the election. We will take a look on the communication strategies used at the first debate of 2020 between the two US presidential candidates: Donald Trump – the 2017-2021 US President and Joe Biden – the former VP during the Obama Administration. The objective of the present research is to analyze the discourse of the two candidates with an emphasis on the

specific issues of communication (the capacity to deliver a clear, concise message, the quality of the response, the structure of the message etc.). The instruments of this research paper are represented not only by the individual discourse analysis, taking into consideration the persona's strategy and tactics used while delivering the speech, but also by a parallel analysis of the transmitted messages of the two participants, prominence given to Trump's and Biden's common grounds and the contradictory opinions or interests exposed by each of the two parties.

Our aim is to present the plans of action designed by Trump and Biden, as well as the character traits emerged through the communication strategies used by the two politicians. In order to show this, the paper focuses on the various levels or dimensions of discourse, such as gestures, syntax, the lexicon, style, rhetoric, meanings, speech acts, strategies, turns, and other aspects of interaction. We will take into consideration the main style of the debate, thus establishing its characteristics and the general message of it. The conclusions will not only show how the analysis has followed the structure of the two candidates' rhetoric, as well as present the US politicians' messages to the American people, but it will also shape an individual profile of Biden and Trump based on the features emphasized throughout the paper. Thus, this paper will prove how Trump's communication strategy is based on his main character traits: straightforwardness, impulsiveness, aggressiveness and loquaciousness, while Biden's political personality is defined through his communication style characterized by empathy, cultural sensitivity, patience and perceptiveness. The following research is meant to prove how different both politicians are in terms of personality and vision, as well as how their rhetoric made the American voters decide to either *Make America Great Again* or *Battle for the Soul of Nation*.

OVERVIEW

Before beginning the discourse analysis itself, it is worth mentioning how the organizers of the debate, Fox News - a news television channel often considered to be a supporter of Trump administration⁶⁹, structured

⁶⁹ Christopher Meyers, "Partisan News, the Myth of Objectivity, and the Standards of Responsible Journalism" in *Journal of Media Ethics*, Vol. 35, No. 3, p. 186, doi:10.1080/23736992.2020.1780131, accessed: 12.10.2020

the debate between the two candidates. American journalist and television news anchor Christopher Wallace was the moderator of a debate that was going to be divided into six parts with the possibility of having spontaneous open discussions, each candidate being given a two-minute time limit to answer Wallace's questions. The discourse follows the patterns of question-answer, in which questions are provided by the moderator and the two candidates take turns to justify their political points. Although the topics were initiated by the host, while the issues were then tackled and distributed alternatively by the two candidates, there were moments in which the initiation of the topics came from the two candidates themselves, as they used arguments to attack each other. The audience was instructed not to react in any way during the debate, therefore the candidates' responses were not influenced by the reactions in the room (booing, cheering, showing approval or disapproval in any manner). In addition, without such interventions coming from the audience, neither was the viewers' perception of the candidates' performance influenced by the public.

STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

The debate between Trump and Biden⁷⁰ starts in a rather informal manner, as evidenced by candidates' attitude when the two of them greet each other using the phrase "how you doing, man?". This is something to be remembered, as during the debate neither Trump nor Biden will resort to using courteous language when addressing the other. The first topic of discussion was the nomination of Amy Coney Barrett for the Supreme Court. While Trump considered that it is his and the Senate's right to make such a proposal, Biden sees the action as an unlawful act and accuses the White House leader of abuse of power. Donald Trump has taken advantage of the opportunity to be the first to speak in order to enforce his authority from the start. However, his speech lacked consistency and had no pertinent arguments. He arrogantly kept repeating the fact that he was the elected president of the US nation, therefore his actions are not to be contested: *"I will tell you very simply. We won the election. Elections have*

⁷⁰ "Read the full transcript from the first presidential debate between Joe Biden and Donald Trump", in USA Today, <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2020/09/30/presidential-debate-read-full-transcript-first-debate/3587462001>, accessed: 12.10.2020

consequences. We have the Senate, we have the White House, and we have a phenomenal nominee [...] So we won the election and we have the right to do it". By stating that the democrats *"wouldn't even think about not doing it"*, he actually admits that, to some extent, the nomination was an exercise of power. As Donald Trump recalled his position of power in the end of his answer, it is to be noticed that his speech is symmetrically structured. Stating that he has the official power to make important decisions, given by the American people both at the beginning and the ending of his speech, he not only highlights that his actions are not to be contested, but also reminds his opponent about his professional position, his rank. The (then) president also emphasized these aspects by his chosen, well-articulated, firmly spoken words of his speech.

Taking into consideration the content, Biden's answer has a better structure. The former VP used valid arguments and provided statistics, which is a fact to he kept in during the entire debate. While Trump tried to place himself on a pedestal, Biden presented himself as a man of the people, the ideal alternative for those who do not sympathize the current president. Furthermore, Biden also uses slightly populist arguments, highlighting that Trump's measures can affect not only the economy, but people's health too. Overall, Biden had a well-structured start, both in terms of the quality of the message and taking into account the gestural language. If Trump wanted to impose, Biden showed himself firm, but equally warm. We should take notice of these first answers given by the two candidates, as from now on the debate will be animated by Trump's interventions over Biden's speech, actions meant to intimidate the opponent and to break the continuity of former VP's ideas. During these interventions Biden will try not to lose his temper, still Trump will systematically contradict him in order to discredit him.

Trump has a much more venomous approach than Biden. In this debate, the president tried to use the examples of the history's greatest strategists, taking Napoleon and Caesar as models in implementing the *divide and conquer* strategy in order to gain ground. When Biden was exposing his strategy about the future of Obamacare, Trump made a remark about the interests of the former Vice President not being in alignment with the Democratic party's: *"[...]That's not what your party says, by the way"*. Moreover, he also claims that there is a discrepancy between Joe's strategies and views and Kamala Harris', his right hand: Joe Biden: *"I*

have the democratic party"; Donald Trump: "Not according to Harris". In order to win the sympathy of the voters and to demonstrate to the American people that he should be the one to occupy the Oval Office for another 4 years, Trump's main strategy is to highlight his superiority in front of the opponent. To do so, the sole purpose of the 45th President of the United States is to monopolize the debate. Something widely known by any individual who has ever heard more than just two Trump discourses is that the US President is not reluctant to making more or less bold and controversial remarks regarding certain topics. Therefore, Trump's remarks meant to attack the opponent are not considered peculiar in the eyes of the audience that is familiar with President's rhetoric. On the other hand, Biden's audience is not exactly familiar with offensive language coming in such a blatant way from the former United States Senator. Proving to be sharp-minded, President Trump is aware that if he continues to attack Biden through interruptions, ironies, sarcasm and aggressive remarks, the former VP will eventually lose his temper and respond to fire with fire. Thus, a first moment of surrender from the Democratic Party representative is noticeable at the minute 10:00 of the debate, in which it seems his efforts to deliver an elegant speech were ceased. The professionalism accumulated in a long political career is being forgotten when, as a response to Trump's interruptions, Biden tells the moderator: "You're not going to be able to shut up". Important to note is that the former Vice President did not directly address to Donald Trump in the first instance, calling for the support of the moderator. This allows us to take a look at Biden's position toward the US president: he is aware that Trump is an authoritarian, unwavering individual, therefore any attempt to negotiate or have a dialogue in a civilized manner is doomed to failure. Moreover, Biden raises a red flag by addressing the moderator instead of talking directly to Trump, thus wanting the audience to know that the president of the US is not complying with the imposed rules of the debate. Consequently, the discussion is now being turned into a dispute. Noting the aggressiveness in Trump's constant interruptions, Biden's next remark is redirected to Trump: "Donald, would you just be quiet for a minute?". Addressing a person by his or her first name would most likely emphasize intimacy, closeness, this being seen as an informal manner in which individuals behave. However, when Joe Biden addresses the American President in a public debate by using his first name not only does he want

to minimize the importance of his opponent, highlighting the banality of the individual, but he also allows a first feeling of intense irritation to be perceived. This is the moment when the former Vice President begins to lose his patience and starts to mirror Trump's attitude.

Henceforth, during the debate Joe Biden will involuntarily take off his courteous, chivalrous individual, honorable man mask. Replies such as *"You're the worst president America has even had [...] Well, it's hard to get any word in with this clown [...]"* not only portray Biden as the anti-gentleman of the debate, but also play a major role in the development of the relationship between him and his sympathizers. Trump is well aware of the fact that if he keeps provoking Biden, the former Senator of the US will eventually lose his patience, responding in a similar manner, which may be considered odd and inadequate by his supporters. A consequence of this could be a possible estrangement between him and his supporters, which would cancel the bonding Biden tries to create with the public. Hence, Trump brings Biden's progress to a zero-starting point.

By taking a look at the given examples we can notice a shift in the attitude displayed by Biden. As a result, this triggers a ping-pong phenomenon for the rest of the debate. From now on, one candidate's direct interventions over the other's speech will occur frequently. Biden is quickly adapting to Trump's strategy, so from a rather passive posture showed at the beginning of Trump's offensive, the former Vice President skillfully turned the siege of the rival into a war of rapid, sharp replies and irony. In this war, each camp wants to make the other known that it benefits of a larger quantity of ammunition than its opponent. In response to the well-structured and substantiated rhetoric of Joe Biden, complemented by his mirroring attitude, Trump becomes even more aggressive, to the point he ends up monopolizing the entire debate, completely ignoring the moderator. Reactions such as: *"You're debating him not me [...] Let me ask my question [...] You had an opportunity to respond [...] Wait, wait. You had your two minutes, sir [...] You made your point. Let him answer it [...]"* coming from the moderator only prove that Christopher Wallace is struggling to find a way to re-establish control over the debate. What is more, the listeners can frequently notice a real metamorphosis of certain discussions on issues of general interest into childish replies given by the two US presidential candidates. Immediately after Biden criticizes the fact that President Trump has superficiality dealt with the COVID-19 issue: *"A lot of people did and a lot*

more are going to die unless he's gets a lot smarter, a lot quicker", Donald Trump's comeback is rather immature: "Did you use the word smart? [...] you graduated either the lower or the lowest in your class. Don't you ever use the word smart with me. Don't ever use that word" [...] Joe Biden: "He sits in his golf course.", President Donald Trump: "You probably play more than I do, Joe." [...] Joe Biden: "Everybody knows he's a liar.", President Donald Trump: "Joe, you're the liar. You graduated last in your class not first in your class". Clearly, the two candidates got carried away when they engaged in this so-called "You are! No, you are!" game, but wasting time in this infantile manner only showed the lack of professionalism and maturity of the former Vice-President and 2017-2021 President of the United States of America.

We can also notice how Trump is actually slandering Biden, reminding the audience not once, but twice about Biden graduating among the lasts in his class. Generally speaking, any blunder can eventually be excused. However, when it comes to such a notorious, influent personality who also represents a direct threat in achieving Trump's goal to win a second term, the 45th President will have to make sure that Biden has to pay for every wrong gesture or inappropriate attitude he has ever shown, therefore what Trump wants is to discredit his opponent by reminding the audience of Biden's "exaggeration" at a press conference in 1988 regarding his studies.⁷¹

Not only did Obamacare provided health insurance coverage for more than 16 million Americans within the first five years of the ACA⁷² but it also revealed another tactic constantly used by both candidates during the whole debate – an "Us" versus "Them" comparison. The objective of this Republicans versus Democrats, Trump versus Biden strategy is creating an antithesis in which each of the candidates project the activities of his own team as beneficial to the American people, while intransigently blaming the opponent's movements. Trump is the first to implement this strategy, calling into question the unbeneficial effects of Obamacare: "Obamacare is no good. We made in better [...] No matter how well you run

⁷¹ Daniel Funke, "Fact-checking a video about Biden's academic record" in *POLITIFACT*, May 7th 2020, <https://www.politifact.com/article/2020/may/07/ad-watch-fact-checking-video-about-bidens-academic/>, accessed: 12.10.2020.

⁷² Debra Sullivan, "The Pros and Cons of Obamacare" in *Healthline*, August 17th 2019, <https://www.healthline.com/health/consumer-healthcare-guide/pros-and-cons-obamacare#pros>, accessed: 13.10.2020.

Obamacare, it's a disaster. It's too expensive [...] We do want to get rid of it and give something that's cheaper and better". He is not only doing this for the above-mentioned purpose, but also to criticize the former Obama administration: *"During the Obama-Biden administration, there was tremendous division. There was hatred"*, and further on in the debate, even the 44th President of the United States Barack Obama, when talking about the number of Federal judges: *"If you left us 128 openings you can't be a good president"*. President Trump presents Obamacare as a big mistake and uses it to highlight the benefits of his management skills, reminding the audience of his successful businessman abilities. However, Trump's answers express more the fact that he is an authoritarian president who can manage a situation well and present less actual pertinent arguments. All of Trump's answers aim to highlight his personal qualities and only vaguely offer a solution or at least a relevant argument. Biden's arguments can seem more rational than Trump's, as he is using statistics and percentages in his speech to provide quality and truthfulness to his arguments. This being taken into consideration, we can also identify Trump's and Biden's target audience. Former VP's speech is tailored to reach his audience formed of all social classes, perhaps with a slight sympathy of the high-educated audience, whereas Trump's speech is more suitable for the low-educated people, by addressing a rhetoric accessible to these people.

The pandemic facing humanity makes it necessary for us to focus our attention on it, with the utmost importance given to the position of the US presidential candidates on the COVID-19 polemics. As already mentioned, this paper focuses on the analysis of the speech of the two US presidential candidates, but it was necessary to offer some background information that might help to better understand the language and structure aspects of the responses given by the two opponents regarding the COVID-19 topic. A general fact is that the number of the victims of the virus has triggered a real public health crisis, therefore the position of the future leader at the helm of the United States on this topic is a strong element contributing to the direction the country is going to take. Donald Trump was from the very beginning a vocal individual when it came to exposing his views on *"China Flu"* or *"Kung Flu"*, constantly blaming China and minimizing the effects of the virus through all information transmission channels (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, press releases, public speeches, meetings, etc.). The pandemic did not stop the two candidates from carrying out their election

campaigns. Unlike Trump, who organized rallies with thousands of participants and has repeatedly refused to wear the mask, Joe Biden has set an example to the American citizens through his public appearances at meetings with limited number of participants where he could be seen wearing protection masks. By Donald Trump's mocking statement regarding Biden being cautious about protection against the virus: *"I don't wear a mask like him. Every time you see him, he's got a mask. He could be speaking 200 feet away from him and he shows up with the biggest mask I've ever seen"*, he only proves to be superficial and ignorant.

To the question of the moderator Chris Wallace: *"How should the American people trust you more than your opponent to deal with this public health crises going forward?"* the first person to respond was the former VP. Biden presented statistics to emphasize the importance of the subject. However, what began as a solid response would lose its impact when Trump's opponent wasted precious time out of the two-minutes time limit to criticize his adversary. Instead of presenting his own strategies, the speech becomes a tough criticism of the decisions and actions taken by Donald Trump. Using *the best defense is a good offense* strategy, Biden publicly expressed his disapproval about Trump Administration management measures: *"He did nothing. He waited and waited and waited. He still doesn't have a plan"*, while offering a rather ambiguous answer about his own strategy: *"I laid out back in March, exactly what we should be doing. And I laid out again in July, what we should be doing"*. What is more, he is focusing more on vague *"what"*, whilst completely ignoring the *"how"*: *"We should be providing all the protective gear possible. We should be providing the money the House has passed in order to be able to go out and get people the help they need to keep their businesses open"*. A brief analysis of Biden's response by the numbers shows that out of two minutes in which he had to convince the US citizens that he is the right person to lead the US and fight for the nation's soul, he allocated only 20% of the total time (24 seconds) to present his strategy and 63% (75 seconds) to criticize the Trump Administration (the rest of the 21 seconds were allocated to presenting statistics and relevant data). The answer of the 2017-2021 US president is commendatory to his administration. The White House leader began his speech with a virulent criticism of Biden, reproaching his lack of courage to take the necessary measures to fight against the virus. He reproached Biden that hadn't there been Trump's actions, the situation would have been much worse.

Donald Trump emphasizes and creates some sort of confirmation of the fact that he actually saved the situation by quoting people manifesting their approval and admiration towards him. This episode of megalomania costs him almost a quarter (more precisely 23%) of his two minutes time limit. When listening to Trump's speech we can notice a tendency to replace the actual arguments with self-praise and confirmations of his actions: „*Dr. Fauci said: "President Trump saved thousands of lives. "Many of your Democrat Governors said: "President Trump did a phenomenal job"*. Although Trump's answer may initially seem imposing, we can notice that there is no substance and no actual arguments. In addition to the 90 seconds of praise (75% of the time limit), the actual answer to the moderator's question can be compressed in only 3 seconds, meaning 2.5% of his entire speech. However, the sequence: *"We did it. We got the gowns. We got the masks. We made the ventilators"* has potential impact on the public, showing superiority over a whole series of specialist reports and statistics. Thinking about Trump's brief but comprehensive style and the fact that he used the simple past tense (emphasizing an already completed action), we can conclude that those 3 seconds were more significant than his opponent's 18 seconds of response in the eyes of his supporters. Also, by telling Biden *"You don't have it in your blood. You could've never done that, Joe"* Trump's criticism against Biden reaches another dimension, as he is suggesting that despite Biden's considerable knowledge and extensive experience, he is simply not made to become the future President of the United States of America. Trump's response is symmetrically constructed, starting with him expressing disapproval of the former VP and concluding with another insult intended to harm the self-identity of Biden: *"You would have been months late. You are months behind me, Joe"*.

FAMILY MINING

Bringing into discussion Trump's and Biden's families and relatives marks another heated moment of the debate. The first one to attempt a verbal attack against his opponent's family was Donald Trump, as he stated that Joe Biden's son, Hunter, accepted a bribe from the Russians. Former VP's tactic was to adopt a defensive strategy and urged to avoid discussing family matters, nonetheless pointing out how controversial the Trump family is: *"I mean, his family, we could talk about all night"*. In this respect, it is to be noticed that although both candidates have adopted a common

strategy, they approached it in rather different ways: on one hand we have an aggressive and offensive Trump, while on the other there is a defensive Biden anticipating the counterattack. In their desire to find the Achilles' heel in his adversary, it is clear that each of the candidates is trying to exploit even the tiniest controversial information regarding his opponent's actions/past/relatives, etc., bringing into discussion any scandal that might affect the polls and the public opinion of the voters. Henceforth, the two candidates are going to apply what we called *family mining* - revealing each other's delicate aspects of their personal life. As we have been accustomed to, Trump will prove to be the most aggressive in applying this strategy. Using his aggressive rhetoric, the Washington leader attacks Biden twice, stating the fact that Hunter, Biden's son, received large amounts of money from the Mayor of Moscow, therefore he is involved in secret affairs with the Russians: *"Somebody gets three and a half million dollars from the mayor of Moscow [...] he got 3+1/2mil from Moscow"*. Trump's accusation is of paramount importance if we are to consider the historic rivalry between the US and Russia. Trump is thus, trying to indirectly discredit Biden in the eyes of the American citizens, creating Biden the profile of a traitor. As a response to this, Biden calls Trump "Putin's puppy".

We can thereby notice how *family mining*, combined with patriotically sensitive topics are used as a tactic to discredit the opponent, creating a more or less illusory profile of Biden and Trump. While the US President is considered the Kremlin leader's puppet, Biden's son may be seen as Russia's friend. What the two candidates reveal is the fact that both of them have sensitive links with the US's main rival. Discrediting the opponent in this way may have some effect on voters, as American tradition implies repulsion toward the communist or post-Soviet world. By their arguments, the two candidates seem to present themselves as two buddies of Russia, which in the eyes of the average American may represent a form of treason. This family mining strategy is also combined with another patriotic sensitivity: the veterans. Former VP offers a solid public speech about their importance, while Trump is again referring to Biden's sons, only this time he speaks about Beau: *"He was thrown out dishonorably discharged...for cocaine use"*. Not only did Trump raised again a matter concerning Biden's personal life into discussion, but to discredit his opponent even more, he also stated that the professional achievements of Biden's sons are due to the fact that their father secretly used the influence he had as America's VP

in order to help them: “And he did not have a job until you became VP [...] he took the money while you were VP”. From a strategic point of view, Trump’s replies have a triple role: 1) To cancel out Biden’s position as a “veteran lover”; 2) To discredit him in the eyes of the Americans, making him look as if he would be a neglectful parent; 3) To highlight an immoral side of Joe Biden, who committed power abuse in order to pull the necessary strings to support his sons in various undisclosed affairs.

Continuing with sensitivities, some xenophobic or racist blunders of the US president can be observed during the debate. Trump’s first faux pas (which persisted in the recent months), was the name given to the pandemic: “China Plague”. Of course, it is proven that the virus originates from the territory of the People’s Republic of China, but the way Trump purposely chooses to call this virus is not the same in which the Spanish Flu or West Nile Flu have toponymy. Trump is aware of the nuance of his words, so by referring to the pandemic as *China Flu* he wants to accuse China once again for spreading the virus, holding the country responsible. Whether China is responsible or not, the leader of the US nation cannot afford to be so virulent in expression for two main reasons: the diplomatic motive and the racial motive. On the international relations scene it is quite obvious that such an offense against the principal trading partner and one of the major global powers can have rather delicate repercussions concerning both the economic and security spheres, let alone the fact that the two states have been in a constant rivalry for a long time. The use of the term “*China Flu*” by the Caucasian President of the United States in an inflammatory context can only prove negligence. Trump’s pejorative way of naming the pandemic “*China Flu*” can as well point out to xenophobic/racist attitudes and antipathy toward the Chinese or Asian Community in the United States. Trump could not have been more reckless in this respect, as the population of the US with American citizenship is at least 5.9% of Asian ethnicity⁷³, to which we also add an impressive number of emigrants, tourists or business partners.

⁷³ “United States - Asian Population Percentage by State, U.S. Census Bureau”, American Community Survey in *Index Mundi*, February 14th 2020, <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/united-states/quick-facts/all-states/asian-population-percentage#map>, accessed: 14.10.2020.

EMOTIONAL APPEAL

From Adolf Hitler to Benito Mussolini and Fidel Castro, even the most controversial examples of history prove how *naturally*, monopolizing the audience is a result of charisma, the influence of prestige and personal charm. *Artificially*, a good speaker can gain public sympathy by creating relations with his/her receptors. Speaking about the United States K-shaped recovery, Biden proves his empathetic side, criticizing the steps taken by the Trump Administration, which favored wealthy people and came to the detriment of middle and low class: *"Billionaires have made another \$300 billion because of his profligate tax proposal, and he only focused on the market. But you folks at home, you folks living in Scranton and Claymont and all the small towns and working-class towns in America, how well are you doing?"*. Even though Biden does not personally know the individuals to whom he is speaking, the use of the informal name "folks" shows the friendly manner in which he addressed to the public, creating a closeness, a bond between him and the audience. On the same note, another strong example of Biden's friendly side (in contrast to Trump's) can be noticed vis-à-vis the BLM topic and the recent protests over the US territory.

The debate also addressed the issue of the *Black Lives Matter* protests, both from a social point of view and from the point of view of public order. Biden adopts a well-structured speech: in the first part he emphasizes the idea of equality, social inclusion, mutual respect: *"It's about equity and equality. It's about decency. It's about the constitution"*, using statistics to validate his arguments, while the second part of the speech presents a comparison between the capabilities of the former US Vice-President to manage the situation and Trump's defects, rash or impetuous actions taken. In this respect we can observe that Biden is adopting a rational strategy, based on the clear emphasis of principles designed to calm the modern sensitivities.

Unlike his rival, Trump is adopting a much more offensive strategy. The US President is putting his arguments and ideas on the table in an angry attack against Biden, bringing up moments from Biden's political past and personal life. It is clear that Trump's tactic is to avoid a response, as he probably can't justify his administration's recent actions, therefore he's shifting the attention to the adversary's flaws. Perhaps Trump also relies to some extent on the "conservatives/traditionalists" card when it comes to such issues. It is clear that the president wanted to exploit a

segment of the entire American electorate, a group of people who accept the values proposed by Trump. In comparison, Biden tries to be a people's person, the president of all who adopted a "welcoming everyone with arms wide open" strategy to ensure that the other segments of the electorate will vote for him.

The issue of global warming is also raised into the debate between the two candidates for the US presidency. Both Trump and Biden are called upon to provide solutions to combat this phenomenon, especially because in recent times environmentally catastrophic events, such as the fires in California took place. From the point of view of the chosen approach, Biden proposes a well-structured speech with relevant arguments and appropriate solutions. Of course, the attacks against Trump will be continued in the same note, in order to demonstrate his qualities in the eyes of the voters via comparison with the president. Tactically, both candidates prefer mutual discrediting over a competition of rational and relevant arguments.

DODGING UNWANTED QUESTIONS

A key attribute of a good speaker is the ability to successfully avoid unwanted questions coming from the information hounds. We consider Trump's replicas to Chris Wallace's questions on the future vaccine against COVID-19 from the beginning of the second part of the debate the most worthy to be mentioned example of such behavior. One thing that is known, also referred to by the moderator, is that the period mentioned by doctors and scientists until the vaccine would have been distributed to the general public (*"Dr. Redfield said it would be summer before the vaccine would become generally available to the public"*) is not into accordance with President Trump's public statements (*"We'll have the answer before November 1st"*). When asked about this rather delicate matter, the president proved to be tenacious enough so that in his prompt reply he would use three techniques to avoid an actual answer.

Hoping he would change the direction of the discussion, Trump skillfully creates a distraction. He wants to be portrayed as a savior in the eyes of voters, a person who will do everything in his power in order to secure the needed resources to ensure the welfare of the American people: *"We can have it a lot sooner. It's a very political thing because people like this would rather make it political than save lives"*. Moreover, in his attempt to look

confident, as a supporter of the *best defense is a good offence* strategy, he also uses the shame game against the political left: *"It's become very political because the left... Or I don't know if I call them left, I don't know what I call them"*. Before Biden took advantage of the vulnerability of the president's position, launching strong criticism and ironic attacks, Trump is resorting to a building bridges technique in order to change the subject to an area with greater opportunity to produce a favorable and positive effect, highlighting the impeccable logistical capacity at his disposal: *"Well, we're going to deliver it right away. We have the military all set up. Logistically, they're all set up. We have our military that delivers soldiers and they can do 200,000 a day"*. It is to be noticed that the 2017-2021 American president's actual answer to Wallace's question is ambiguous: *"I've spoken to all of the people that you have to speak to [...] They can go faster than that by a lot"*. Despite proving to know some elements of dodging unwanted questions, the quality of the response *per se* is poor, and it is also obvious that Donald Trump it is trying to use all the available ammunition to get rid of the persistent questions of the moderator.

DISCOURSE MARKERS

With regard to text mining, there were some common items of discourse markers that were used by both the 45th President and the former VP during the Obama Administration, including the restricted usage of "well" (exactly 15 times by each candidate) and the use of the "by the way" shift indicator (15 times by Biden, 13 times by Trump). In terms of discourse markers used to maintain interactivity, "well" is utilized when the context is not the most relevant for the interpretation of the impending utterances. Although, it is often used in daily conversations, "well" is less expected in interview contexts, as it might leave the impression that its ideational function signifies an unstable and uncertain content.

This is well-reflected in the discursive approach of both candidates. They also used the turn-media conversation marker "by the way" to maximize the spontaneity of their speeches. This may describe the ideational function marking that the upcoming topic is not closely related to the discourse topic. This element of dialogue transitivity was useful in moving the focus of the conversation to a larger or more threatening subject that would back up one's point of view, often by distracting the speaker, the crowd, and the adversary from hitting them on their weaknesses.

However, the two candidates turned their attention away from their shortcomings by using shift indicators such as “by the way.” This divergence appeared to disrupt the sense of coherence and continuity of the discourse, but was advantageous to the protection of their political figure.⁷⁴

POLARITY

If we are to consider the polarity of the debate, overall it seems that Trump expressed a larger amount of negative opinions than Biden.⁷⁵ If during the Trump-Clinton 2016 presidential debate Trump strategically used such vocabulary, appealing to fear in order to make America look unstable and unsafe whilst trying to portray himself as the one capable to change the status of a fragile America into a grandiose nation, this time the 45th President’s negative wording betrays his vulnerability. This is more noticeable when the candidate shared his thoughts on the transparency of the election process.

One last interesting aspect of the debate is its final note, where we can observe the views of the two candidates on the American electoral system. Something we got used to during this analysis is that the views expressed by Trump and Biden are diametrically opposed. Trump suggests that the electoral system is a fragile one, hard to manage and not fraud-proof. He also notes the shortcomings in the American electoral infrastructure, among with a possible plot against him: *“These people aren’t equipped to handle it, number one. Number two, they cheat. They cheat. Hey, they found ballots in a wastepaper basket three days ago, and they all had the name military ballots. There were military. They all had the name Trump on them”*. Trump’s strategy is to persuade the US electorate that the veracity of the elections can be jeopardized by these system loopholes. In this way, the electorate can become more active and more attentive to the potential irregularities noticed. Implicitly, Trump calls on his supporters while also preparing the grounds for a possible defeat. It is a fact that out of the two candidates, the

⁷⁴ Quang Nguyen, “Trump’s Strategies in the First Presidential Debate: A Critical Discourse Analysis” in *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation (IJLLT)*, vol. 3, p.73, DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2020.3.5.8, accessed: 15.10.2020.

⁷⁵ “Analyzing the Presidential Debate 2020 with text mining techniques” in *Towards Data Science*, October 15th 2020, <https://towardsdatascience.com/analyzing-the-chaotic-presidential-debate-2020-with-text-mining-techniques-238ed09d74c1>, accessed: 15.10.2020.

one who has more to lose is the current (at the time this article was written) president. Therefore, by using his *elections will be rigged* rhetoric, Donald Trump is preparing a possible alibi in case of defeat.

On the contrast, Biden's reply shows his confidence in the American voting system: *"And here's the deal. We count the ballots, as you pointed out. Some of these ballots in some states can't even be opened until election day. And if there's thousands of ballots, it's going to take time to do it. And by the way, our military... They've been voting by ballots since the end of the Civil War, in effect. And that's what's going to happen"*. The former Vice-President felt the uncertainty in his opponent's speech and skillfully exploited it. Let alone Biden appealed to the way the electoral process works, arguing what a complex, hard to defuse system is, but his answer was strengthened by offering an historical example which gave legitimacy to his argument too.

CONCLUSIONS

Donald Trump and Joe Biden, the two running candidates for The White House are aware of the impact of their speeches during the debate. The present analysis has followed the structure of the two candidates' rhetoric, as well as both American politicians' messages towards the American people. The following lines are going to underline the main conclusions of this research, beside an individual profile of each candidate based on the features emphasized throughout the analysis.

The last four-year American President, Donald Trump aimed the second consecutive mandate. To be sure of his president status until 2024 the controversial candidate has designed a communication strategy based on his main features: aggressiveness, loquaciousness, straightforwardness and impulsiveness. Donald Trump's first intervention meant to be a reassurance of his power status. From the very beginning of the debate Trump wanted to emphasize the idea that he is the chosen president of all American people and his deeds represent a validation of 2016 voters' trust. Republican former President Donald Trump's discourse was hostile, as it was marked by frequent interruptions and direct interventions, retorts through which he appeared convinced that the economy and social

dynamics of the United States had experienced one of the greatest moments in American history, before the pandemic.⁷⁶

Trump proved himself to be the offensive candidate of the meeting. The American president channeled his energy approaching an aggressive speech spiced up with repeated interference over his opponent's speech. The fact led to meaningless replicas, colorful language meant to undermine Biden's speech. As tactical means, the former American president uses a series of interruptions in the form of comments or short questions, in order to maintain control of the debate and destabilize the opponent's position. By analyzing these actions, we can see how he manages to distract the attention from the general topic of discussion, as well as how Joe Biden is interrupted and thus, his speech loses coherence and substance. Trump's linguistic styles shows that he uses these tactics as means of power control during the debate.⁷⁷ Trump went on fulfilling his power message with different segments of his speech which can be classified as laudatory. In this regard, former president Trump's replies can be divided into two categories: clear examples and vague answers, both groups validating the laudatory speech. The main idea of Trump's rhetoric is aggressiveness. Former president's answers did not bring out solid arguments, but rather followed the cliché "better me than you" or "he would have done it worse". These constant comparisons between Trump and Biden generated frontal assault especially on the latter. The White House former leader has adopted a divide and conquer strategy in order to point out any possible disapproving detail of Joe Biden's life, either about political career or personal life. Trump's main defensive capability was manifested through sharp counterattacks with the aim of avoiding a direct response.

The strategy used by Trump combines four tactics specific to presidential debates. These four tactics are represented by (1) self-acclamation, (2) description of the opposing candidate in an aggressive manner, through verbal attack, (3) self-rectification through defense against accusations made by opposing candidates, and (4) extra-vocalization.

⁷⁶ Tantuk Oztas, "ANALYSIS - First round of Biden vs Trump: An inconclusive debate" in *Anadolu Agency*, October 10th 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis/analysis-first-round-of-biden-vs-trump-an-inconclusive-debate/1997237#>, accessed: 16.10.2020.

⁷⁷ Quang Nguyen, "Trump's Strategies in the First Presidential Debate: A Critical Discourse Analysis" in *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation (IJLLT)*, vol. 3, p.75, DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2020.3.5.8, accessed: 16.10.2020.

Trump depicted himself as a straightforward and tentative individual,⁷⁸ achieving his primary goal: Instead of presenting an actual agenda or vision, he was focused on undercutting and disorienting Biden and not giving his opponent the opportunity to show up superior or to be put in a more advantageous position. The linguistic style of the former American President was adapted to be easily perceived by his target audience, which is wide and consists of richly diversified, both as an educational level and as shared ideas and principles individuals, so Trump used simple, lively language, dynamic and easily adaptable to the level of understanding of the audience. This approach, correlated with Trump's personal behavioral style, demonstrates an anti-intellectual tendency.⁷⁹

The Democrats' candidate is also a fascinating individual, whose communication style is at least as complex as Trump's. Through his well-structured speech and the arguments used during the debate, not only did Biden seem to have a series of attributes the future leader of the White House is mandatory to possess but he also displayed qualities that his term will blend into a compassionate, well-organized and decisive leadership. What is more, using antithesis, he presents his qualities in contrast to the defects of his rival, emphasizing the poor presidential administration of Donald Trump, especially in the context of the health crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Biden claimed that the president initially ignored the severity of the virus, adding that the president's attitude at the beginning of the pandemic and his actions were the ones to actually deepen the health crisis.

Joe Biden was constantly aware of the aggressiveness in his opponent's speech. In spite of that, during the first minutes of the debate Joe Biden tried to portray himself as an educated candidate bringing into discussion relevant arguments and a well-structured speech. The evolution of the debate, marked by the sharp interventions of the opponent, prompted Biden to take off his velvet gloves, descending from the initially imposed level of a gentleman. Although during the debate Biden proved tact and patience, an attitude worthy of the future American president, there were moments when the democrat's nerves were stretched to the limit. The sour words of Biden came as direct reactions to the wave of interruptions and verbal attacks made by his republican opponent, the

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, p.71.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem* p.69

antipathy between the two being most obvious. Biden called Trump a clown and a liar, a racist and told him that he's "*the worst president America has ever had*". Although there were moments in which the democrat lost his temper, these harsh remarks coming from Biden occurred rather rarely, as most of the time he chose to calmly approach the opponent's attacks. Biden's witty strategy to ignore Trump's interventions was to physically turn towards the cameras, facing them and addressing the American people instead of his chatting with his rival. Turning to the cameras was some sort of refuge from the constant stream of words coming from the republican's representative, and it helped him strengthen an element crucial to his appeal: developing a bond with the American people by landing empathetic lines.⁸⁰

The former VP during Obama's Administration tried to take advantage of the entire context and exploit the opponent's lack of arguments through much more structured interventions on one hand and maintaining a more elegant allure than the 2017-2021 president's on the other. During his speech, Biden was attentive to potentially sensitive issues and proved political correctness. It is clear that he has sought to make use of both the attention to modern sensitivities and the lacks in his opponent's rhetoric. Despite Biden being subjected to virulent attacks on his political past and family, his recovery and hence the difference between the two candidates, has been made by a more rational approach to issues such as the management of the health crisis, the resulting economic downturn, protests and racial problems or climate change. Although his speech contained attacks against his opponent as well, the overall structure presents a more balanced arguments-criticism report.

Both politicians were abrasive in their tactics and used their time to corner one another on personal and family issues. As a result, they became emotional and hostile in their responses to each other's allegations. Although former President Trump's tone was louder and more optimistic as he looked at his rival, former Vice President Biden's tone was calmer yet rebuking, as he often talked directly to the camera or looking at the moderator. The former VP had not outperformed his Republican rival, but he had been more effective in empathizing with the crowd. His promise to

⁸⁰ Shane Goldmacher, "Six Takeaways From the First Presidential Debate" in *The New York Times*, September 30th 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/30/us/politics/debate-takeaways.html>, accessed: 17.10.2020.

implement a more equitable healthcare scheme was more compelling and feasible, showing empathy to the public. He spoke directly to the cameras in a sympathetic manner, condoling with the families who had lost loved ones to the COVID-19 virus. Biden certainly has a better track record as he communicates with the masses through emotional appeals. Knowing that, President Trump was resilient in the debate and kept talking over him to contain his exposure.⁸¹

As mentioned in the introduction of this research, the ability to communicate is a defining aspect in the evolution of human civilization, both as individuals and as a society. The development of the ability to transmit the message followed the natural course of technological developments made by human intelligence. Because of the limits imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, people-to-people relations adapt to new requirements and modern means of communication become an integrated, compulsory part of our lives. From a simple SMS to extensive TV programs, individuals seek to make up for the lack of natural, face-to-face communication through such technologies of the contemporary world.

The presidential elections, as a major event held at a critical time of pandemic, benefited from wide-ranging media coverage across the meridians thanks to modern communication capabilities. The debate between the two candidates has been a major event in the context of the American electoral process. The Americans have realized the need for visibility of this debate and made sure that the whole event is broadcasted through all possible media channels, both online and offline. The event's organizers broadcasted the entire debate live via YouTube, which has been viewed by 73 million people from all over the world just in the evening of the debate.⁸² The analysis carried out cannot impose a real winner or a 'pole-position' placement neither for Biden nor for Trump, as the first round of the US 2020 presidential election debate did not offer a strong insight into the election manifesto of the candidates. Both candidates showed their flaws, mainly due to mutual attacks and a common approach to exploit the opponent's minuses. In terms of valid arguments provided, although at a first impression Biden offered a better structured speech

⁸¹ Oztas, *op.cit.*

⁸² John Koblin, „In TV Ratings, Trump vs. Biden Was No Match for Trump vs. Clinton” in *The New York Times*, September 30th 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/30/business/media/trump-biden-debate-ratings.html>, accessed: 17.10.2020.

overall, the democrat did not gain a considerable advantage. The debate on September 29th, 2020 is only another proof of how two candidates are different in terms of personality, vision and speech rhetoric. As a major event in the American election process, the outcome might have proven which one of the two candidates' communication strategy really appealed to the public, making the Americans decide they want a president who will battle for the soul of their nation.

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THE FIRST 2020 PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE: TRUMP VS. BIDEN. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

***"Analyzing the Presidential Debate 2020 with text mining techniques" in *Towards Data Science*, October 15th 2020, <https://towardsdatascience.com/analyzing-the-chaotic-presidential-debate-2020-with-text-mining-techniques-238ed09d74c1>, accessed in 15.10.2020.

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POLITICAL COMMUNICATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT: The Covid-19 Pandemic turned out to be a stress test for all the countries worldwide, which brought to the surface "their deep, sticky societal structures". The countries' governments made different choices worldwide and adopted various strategies to improve the situation. This paper aims to outline the ambiguous, misleading, improper, and inadequate communication offered to the citizens of Romania in the context of pandemic and to compare it with the type of communication adopted by Sweden, where the citizen's responsibility and the open and sincere communication were the main strategies of beating the virus. Communication plays a vital role in the citizens' satisfaction, and since the information offered is not meant to improve their perception, negative consequences will follow. The political communication of these two countries is very different, approaching different strategies for the problem. In Romania, the government takes measures to remediate the situation fast and stop increasing cases because of the precarious medical system. In Sweden, the government is implementing strategies that will be beneficial for a long time.

Keywords: Covid-19 Pandemic; Political Communication; Government vs Citizens; Romania; Sweden.

INTRODUCTION

The communication process implies the direct and indirect transmission of messages from one person to another or from one entity to another. According to DEX, communication is "1-2. oral or written information. 3. sharing. 4. connection. 5-6. means of establishing connections (with someone or something)." From this definition, we can observe how communication from a simple action of transmitting information becomes the desire of each individual to share ideas, emotions, feelings, frustrations, and thoughts to create a connection. Communication

is the primary process that establishes relationships and connections between people and organisations. Humans can interact, mainly through language and through images, signs, symbols, facial expressions, and gestures. Two main elements in every situation of communication are the sender and the receiver, which in this paper will be represented by the government, respectively the citizens, and their relation will be analysed. Although communication does not seem very difficult, it often encounters obstacles and barriers.

Fred C. Lunenburg mentions that the word communication has the origin in Latin, *communis*, meaning “common”, which refers to communication, the common understanding of the message, as a priority to the partners involved. The participants in this process determine good quality communication. Any problem that may occur between the participants will affect the quality, accuracy, and effectiveness of the communication (Lunenburg, 2010, p. 3). Communication seems to encounter blockages quite often in everyday life, which can affect the relations between people. Kendra Shaw mentioned some typical barriers to which people are resilient. Among them, we can encounter the social barriers (lack of community support, social norms, and group conformity), cultural barriers (tradition, culture, customs, religion), economic barriers (lack of property rights, corruption, fiscal infrastructure) and political barriers (ideology, values) (Shaw, 2020).

In the broad field of communication and its barriers, we encounter the political type of communication carried out by world leaders and political leaders to communicate with people. Kees Brants and Katrin Voltmer state that political communication “has undergone dramatic changes, which are believed to have far-reaching consequences for the way in which democratic politics works” and that politicians started to put “effort, resources and sophistication into communicating with citizens” as they never did before (2011, p. 1).

Richard M. Perloff defines the concept of political communication as

“the process by which language and symbols, employed by leaders, media, or citizens, exert intended or unintended effects on the political cognitions, attitudes, or behaviours of individuals or on outcomes that bear on the public policy of a nation, state, or community”. (Perloff, 2014, p. 401)

The author regards this definition from several angles as it follows (2014, pp. 30-33):

1. "Political communication is a process" – it takes more than a flick of a wrist to turn an initiative into "a credible bill and a bill into a law";
2. "Political communication calls centrally on words and symbols" – this refers to the process of making people "think and act in ways that they might not otherwise think and act";
3. "There are three main players in political communication" – (I) the group of leaders and influence agents (the "elites of politics"); (II) the media (bloggers, vloggers, citizen-journalists); (III) the citizenry ("the cacophonous combination of the politically engaged and opinionated, along with the indifferent and woefully ignorant");
4. "Political communication effects can be intended or unintended";
5. "Political communication effects occur on a variety of levels" – (I) microlevel ("affecting individuals' thoughts, candidate assessments, feelings, attitudes, and behaviour"); (II) macrolevel ("effects on public opinion, institutional change or retrenchment, political activism, and public policy").

The way people feel about themselves and how they think and interact in a particular community determines their ability to communicate. The ability to communicate with individuals determines communication effectiveness. This paper aims to analyse the political communication during the Covid-19 Pandemic and compare it in Romania and Sweden. In order to sustain my arguments, I will provide examples based on my research in this field and use the qualitative analysis to interpret the data and the results.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In communication, there are often barriers and blockages that affect the initial message and its meaning. In *Social Barriers to Adaptation* (2011), Lindsey Jones states that social and institutional barriers include and are related to cognitive behaviour and the normative behaviour that both may

transform into obstacles. The author studied the way people react to changes taking into consideration the social and cultural process that governs their reaction. Further, the cognitive, normative, and institutional barriers each play a significant role in the process of communication and adaptation of humans. Institutional barriers refer to how institutions govern and influence people in making decisions and adapting to social change. According to the author, institutions must have three roles: first, to “structure impacts and vulnerability”; second, to mediate between individual and collective responses to change; third, to act as primary means of delivering resources in order to facilitate adaptation. The cognitive barriers involve the psychological process of people reacting to change. Normative barriers are compounded of the way cultural standards influence people in responding to threats to their existence. There is an idea in the author’s book which claims that “people’s perceptions and cognitive reactions to threats can range considerably from denial and apathy to helplessness, uncertainty, and acceptance” (Jones, 2011, pp. 41-60). Transposing these principles into the current situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, the institutional capacity to manage the situation favouring the citizens was not as adequate. Considering Lindsey Jones’s three critical roles of the institutions, we must say that they failed to fulfil their obligations towards citizens, pushing them closer to the normative barriers, which refer to people influenced by cultural standards in managing the threats to their existence. The government’s communication with people encountered blockages and discrepancies. The information was most of the time contradictory and inaccurate, offering nothing but uncertainty, an ambiguity which led to panic, anger, and confusion among people. Further, this paper aims to analyse this miscommunication and to present both conclusions and recommendations for the situation.

In the last three decades, after the crush of the communist regime in 1989, many people in Romania emigrated abroad in search of better opportunities, better jobs, and better lives. The remaining ones were overwhelmed by the democracy and freedom established in the country. During the years, more and more people gave up their rights to vote, and, for example, in this year’s elections, the percentage of 40% was exceeded only in Mehedinți County. The overall average does not exceed 32%, so what happens with 68% of the population? Nowadays, most of the time, people tend to find their contributions unimportant and unnecessary and

think they would not make any difference. Still, besides these, the primordial factor is the lack of trust citizens have in their government.

The decline of trusting the government is illustrated in the United States of America too, when in 1964,

“three-quarters of Americans said that they trusted the federal government ‘to do the right thing’. Yet after only three decades, in 1994, only a quarter of the citizens pursued this argument. Also, in the United Kingdom, the trust in the government declined “from 47 per cent in 1987 to 28 per cent in 2001” (Hague & Harrop, 2004, p. 91, *apud* Bromley & Curtice, 2002).

In the book, *Comparative Government and Politics*, Rod Hague and Martin Harrop claim that citizens are not always aware of political power or a central government. They often seem to agree with everything as long as the national or international decisions do not affect them and their lives. The decision to remain uninvolved in any political action and the fact that most of the citizens are not aware consciously of their power in a state erase any influence they might have in that state, as the author underlines in the following paragraph:

“In a subject political culture, (...) citizens see themselves not as participants in the political process but as subjects of the government, as with people living under a dictatorship. Although we may not associate subject cultures with democracies, subject attitudes may be growing among young people, many of whom remain distant from politics even though they recognise the government’s impact on their lives.” (Hague & Harrop, 2004, p. 89)

Kees Brants and Katrin Voltmer share this idea and state that, especially the young, “no longer regard the information provided by professional journalism as relevant to their own lives and have instead turned to the wide and diffuse spaces of the Internet to satisfy their needs for entertainment and information” (2011, p. 1). Silvia Cambié and Yang-May Ooi outline a potential solution to young people’s stimulation to vote.

They claim that since young people are so engaged in social media and see the internet as a significant part of their lives, maybe this will help. In order to support their argument, the authors give the example the presidential candidate Barack Obama, “who used social media with the most innovation and panache”. Obama’s effort was considerable, and he had an account on every social media channel, a blog, a personal website, a social networking site. He used SMS and ringtones to capture voters, and finally, he had an Obama application. Successfully, as the Silvia Cambié and Yang-May Ooi state, “Mr Obama had an unprecedented level of support among young people and new voters in the 2008 election. He won the votes of those under 30 by an impressive 66 per cent to 31 per cent, much higher than in any previous election” (2009, p. 151).

In his book from 2016, Arthur Lupia claims that “if citizens do not believe that a source shares their values and has relevant expertise, then framing attempts are less effective or completely ineffective” and he considers that “some framing effects are larger not for relatively uninformed ‘puppets’, but rather for people who are relatively well informed about an issue” (Lupia, 2016, p. 142):

“According to the framing theory of public opinion, citizens are not capable of political judgment: the very same person will approve a course of government action or oppose it depending on how the action happens to be framed at the moment of choice. (...) They are instead puppets, voting thumbs up or down depending on how issues are framed, their strings being pulled by elites who frame issues to guarantee political outcomes.” (Sniderman & Theriault, 1999, p. 158)

Further, in the first volume of the research program of the European Science Foundation entitled *Citizens and the State*, Roberto Biorcio and Renato Mannheimer define the relationship between citizens and political parties as a complex one and “as a one-dimensional variable whose intensity and variations through time and space can be measured” (Biorcio & Mannheimer, 1995, p. 207). They state that such connections outline “a complex system” which comprises “a collective identity and the intermediation of specific interests” formed by both an affective aspect and a rational-instrumental aspect of the relationship citizens-parties, accurately explained in the following paragraph:

“The integrated relationship does not necessarily imply a particularly strong connection but, rather, a situation in which the two central aspects of the party citizen linkage are positively integrated; this is the representation pact that has historically characterised the relationship between electors and the most important mass parties in Europe. The cohesion between the two dimensions of the relationship has been ensured largely by the particular role played by ideology, both in forming the identity of individual parties and as a cognitive and value-sifting filter for the orientation of voters.” (Biorcio & Mannheimer, 1995, p. 208)

The relationship between citizens and politicians developed because of various political interests, which turned to be, during the ages, favouring the government rather than the citizens. However, taking advantage of the citizens’ lack of trust, the government’s political parties try insidiously to obtain votes in the election times by focusing on the lower class of the society, including the elderly and the helpless. As Arthur Lupia mentioned, citizens are often considered uninformed, lax, and uninterested in their country’s future. For this reason, they become incapable of deciding on matters concerning their welfare or their country’s welfare.

This lack of trust and lack of interest among people is mainly caused by the inefficient, inappropriate, misleading, and false information that the government communicates. According to a study, citizens’ trust in the government is about 13,7% in the government, parliament 9,5%, and political parties 9,1% (Andone, 2020). Moreover, the lack of trust in the government is caused by the information type citizens take into consideration. Ola Listhaug states that “negative information about political objects receives more attention than positive information” and that if citizens rely on negative news reported by mass media as “a source of political knowledge”, “this would constitute a factor which might contribute to a continuous decline in trust” (1995, p. 264).

In an online article, Professor Lars Trägårdh defines the pandemic as “a huge stress test for countries, a test that brings to the surface their deep, sticky societal structures”. He states that

“it is wise to respect citizens as responsible, ethical beings, equal in their contributions” because it is “the best way to

develop the reciprocity that is the hallmark of a high-trust society: mutual trust between citizens, and between citizens and the state” (2020).

Professor Forrest V. Morgeson, in his book, *Citizen Satisfaction: Improving Government, Performance, Efficiency, and Trust Citizen*, outlines the fact that trust is “a vital good in a democratic society” and “when citizens generally trust their government and one another, the government’s job becomes considerably easier”. Moreover, the author states that communication plays a crucial role in the process of citizens’ satisfaction, and the information should “be made freely available to the public” to “help shape or even transform citizen perceptions of government performance as a whole” (2014, p. 40).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper’s main objective is to analyse the political communication during the Covid-19 Pandemic and compare it in Romania and Sweden. The second objective is to compare Sweden’s actions and measures with the ones adopted by Romania, and the final objective is to establish which country managed best the COVID-19 crisis.

As a guideline in my work, I settled the following research questions:

1. Are Sweden measures better than the ones adopted in Romania?
2. Is indeed Sweden management beneficial in the long term?
3. Why are the measures adopted in these two countries completely different?

In order to analyse the data gathered about the two countries, I will use the qualitative analysis. The collected data comes from secondary sources and authors who tackled this subject matter before. Electronic sources (articles, blogs, newspapers) are another important source of information that I used. Finally, I shall provide accurate answers for my research questions and precise information based on my research in this field.

CASE STUDY

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Romania’s government failed to establish peace and find more adequate solutions for the problem. Already known for the worst healthcare system, Romania managed the

situation in a deplorable manner, considering that the number of cases still grows and the vaccine remains uncertain for some citizens (Gherasim, 2020). Any interaction between people was prohibited, and the number of those who manage to meet was small. On the other hand, Romania is the country that kept the schools closed for a very long time and settled more lockdowns than any other country. At the beginning of the pandemic, the government transmitted messages to the people by claiming that this situation is manageable and they will find an efficient solution soon. This message constantly changed, and it developed in an interdictions reminder that brought nothing but more anxiety among citizens. According to a survey about the vaccination campaign in Romania with 1085 respondents, in the first question, they were asked how much they trust the government's vaccination campaign, and 41% of them stated that they have minimal trust, and 32% said that they have only a little confidence. The second question was if they think that the government correctly informed the population about the Covid-19 situation and 58% of them said no, while 33% of them said yes (Pascovschi, 2020). According to a similar study, 43% of the population has little confidence, and 27,6% has very little faith in the officials' information about the Covid-19 pandemic (Şandru, 2020).

This situation is managed differently in countries like Sweden, where the government is sincere with its citizens. It tries to approach open discussions and offer the citizens their rightful place in society. Once the pandemic started, Sweden provided recommendations and pieces of advice to its citizens and "relied on voluntary social distancing guidelines". The state epidemiologist claimed that there was "no strong evidence that a lockdown would have made that much of a difference" (Savage, 2020). The government of Sweden states that this pandemic is not a sprint but a marathon, and their decisions and solution and meant to last long. Helena Nordensttdt, a clinical epidemiologist and researcher in global health, states that "people are not as exhausted as they might be in other countries where the restrictions have been much wider and much stricter" (Savage, 2020). Other countries maybe meaning Romania, where the government's pressure becomes less bearable for the citizens (Savage, 2020).

The political communication of these two countries is very different, approaching different strategies for the problem. In Romania, the government takes measures to remediate the situation fast and stop increasing cases because of the precarious medical system. In Sweden,

strategies are implemented that will be beneficial for a long time. Due to the era of globalisation, a country's government's decisions are known, judged, and analysed by other countries and their citizens. Before mass media and the "era of mass communication, relations between states were carried on largely behind closed doors, with heavy reliance on secret diplomacy and subterfuge", of which only the elites were aware. The "mass of the people remained in relative ignorance of their governments' activities in this sphere", so they remained calm (McNair, 2011, p. 173). The global communication of global problems causes global panic. In other words, why should citizens worry about the government's issues at such a scale? On the other hand, the system of government of the two countries is very different because the Swedish one "guarantees citizens the right to obtain information freely, hold demonstrations, form political parties and practice their religion" (Swedish Institute, 2020). In Romania, the government is not oriented toward its citizens' welfare and trust.

In Sweden, a society that respects gender equality and children rights, "a total lockdown was unsuitable in the long term" because "if schools and pre-schools were closed, for instance, parents would have to leave work to home-school". Thus, critical sectors would have remained without workers (Trägårdh, 2020).

In Romania, the schools are closed for one year now, and online schooling does not help a nation where access to online and technological resources is a privilege and a dream for many children. Another aspect that shows many differences between the two countries is that, unlike Romania, Sweden avoided lockdowns and claimed that "social distancing is a matter of self-regulation". For this reason, "citizens were instructed to use their judgement, and to take individual responsibility within a framework that rested on mutual trust, rather than top-down control" (Trägårdh, 2020). On the other hand, in Romania, citizens would have never respected such matters nor listen to or treat them with any serosity (Trägårdh, 2020).

Both Swedish and Romanian governments had the same purposes: to protect people's lives and health and to secure health care systems' capacity. However, they did it completely different, adopting opposite measures. In Sweden, the government finds it essential to implement "the right measure at the right time, to achieve the best possible impact". Every decision must be carefully weighed to prevent harmful effects on society and public health. One of the priorities of the government is to secure

citizens' lives, health and jobs. Prime Minister Stefan Löfven states that (Prime Minister's Office, 2020):

"Our government agencies and our health care system are doing everything they can. But every person in Sweden needs to take individual responsibility. If everyone takes responsibility, we can keep the spread of the virus in check. Follow the authorities' advice: if you have even the slightest symptoms, do not go to work and refrain from meeting other people."

This is a very general message used in Romania also. Its purpose is to ensure the citizens that right measures are taken for their safety. The essential element in a crisis is trust. Swedish citizens trust their government at a high level, "this means that a large proportion of people follow government agencies' advice". Currently, citizens act responsibly to prevent the spread of the virus. According to a Prime Minister article Swedish government aims to: limit the spread of the virus, secure medical care system and resources, narrow the impact on critical domains, attenuate the impact on businesses, provide information to ease concern, and "implement the right measures in the right time" (Prime Minister's Office, 2020).

Unlike Sweden, Romania adopted many different measures, imposed isolation, quarantine, night quarantine, compulsory wear of masks, statements for leaving houses, and limited meetings with a small number of friends. In Romania, the main concern was directed towards the precarious medical system, and most of the measures were adopted to protect it from collapse. Medically speaking, hospitals were divided into sections depending on disease severity on persons. The entire attention was directed to the virus and its victims, and the government took measure to reduce the pressure from the sanitary units. Reducing hospitalisations and surgeries to what is strictly necessary is one of the primary measures Romania adopted. Romania also deals with the lack of specialised equipment and provisions (Popescu, 2020).

Economically, Romania's government adopted measures to support the population and enterprises in the economic crisis. They offered budget money to enterprises with employees in technological unemployment or postponed banks rates for the people. Unfortunately, closed schools

significantly affected both children and parents. Employment decreased, and SMEs were the most affected by the crisis (Popescu, 2020).

Citizens were mainly affected by chaotic communication during the crisis. Since the pandemic started, the government and the officials offered contradictory and inconsistent information. Often, the officials held different speeches on the same topic and often were in a mismatch.

Another problem is that the measures and restrictions adopted were announced late at night and with very little time before implementation (Popescu, 2020). Such actions consolidate the lack of trust Romanians have in their government and why the country's future is left aside by young people. For a society's welfare, there needs to be a connection between citizens and officials or institutions to properly work as a team in crisis times. As a brief comparison, Sweden's government won its citizens' trust by sincerely communicating with them, while in Romania, such a thing never happened.

Apparently, even if the Swedish model adopted a "light-touch approach" to the virus and hoped to succeed, the country's king's final opinion is that this approach failed (Geoghegan, 2021). However, it succeeded in preserving the country's citizens' mental and emotional health and their lives, social activities, and interactions were not as affected as they are in Romania. The Swedish approach was appreciated by the MP Cristopher Chope and the Telegraph columnist Allison Pearson, who admired how Sweden handled the pandemic clear and straightforward. However, Romania must not be left aside, and the effort must be appreciated since it did things and adopted measures that led to a number of short-term successes.

CONCLUSIONS

In the globalisation era, mass communication is widely and generally interpretable and often offers ambiguity and uncertainty. Speaking of communication, people shall improve their communicative skills globally, and it shall start with human interaction and then continue with and inside large organisations. Political communication has indeed the purpose of not bringing panic and anxiety between citizens. Yet, thousands of interpretations of a single sentence by mass media may mislead and perturb the message's actual meaning. The COVID-19 pandemic pushed

governments of the world to make decisions for which they were mostly not prepared. Romania is one of the least ready countries for such a situation and adopted measures and restrictions aimed at success in the short-term, imposing restrictions on the citizens without considering their needs. On the other hand, Sweden was people-oriented and adapted a strategy that shall last in the long term, based on citizens' responsibility.

The information given to the citizens of the two countries was considerably different and based on cultural aspects. Romania would have never accepted the Swedish measures. Their type of open communication would have never been listened to or paid attention to, mainly because of the lack of trust Romanians have in their government. Professor Lars Trägårdh offers the key to a trust-based relation and states that mutual respect and ethical behaviour will develop the reciprocity a society needs.

Moreover, professor Forrest V. Morgeson suggests a good democracy and a good relation between the government and the citizens: accurate communication. It is indeed a problem because social media affects citizens and their governments' connection because of the press's misleading information and fake news. As Brian McNair mentioned, people were more relaxed before mass media and mass communication, and the problems of the government were taking care of behind closed doors. Globalisation and free access to information give everybody the capacity to express their opinions about every country's decisional authorities and question them.

In order to respond to my first research question, *Are Sweden's measures better than the ones adopted in Romania?* I must say that the main benefit they had is the positive impact on citizens' mental welfare. As the clinical epidemiologist and researcher in global health, Helena Nordenstdt, said, people were not as exhausted as in other countries with stricter and broader restrictions. Referring to the second research question, *Is Sweden management beneficial in the long term?* I must say that, based on the final information collected, that a light approach on the coronavirus apparently did not work, and the cases have increased. However, as I mentioned earlier, citizens' mental health and social activities were not significantly damaged, which may be beneficial in the long term. My last research question *Why are the measures adopted in these two countries completely different?* must be responded to considering cultural differences and background of the two countries growing apart in history. The cultural differences reflect on the opposite approaches to the crisis. Speaking of

cultural behaviour and self-discipline, I consider that Sweden's measures would have never been listened in Romania. The ones adopted in Romania would have never been suitable for Swedish people.

To sum up, in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, both countries managed the situation according to their possibilities, focusing on the critical sectors and weak points in order to preserve their stability. The entire world adopted measures and managed the pandemic without a specific crisis plan or scheme. Hopefully, following similar situations will be managed better, diminished and even stopped and prevented in the future.

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CRISIS COMMUNICATION: AN ANALYSIS OF JACINDA ARDERN'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS

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ABSTRACT: Mitigating an invisible threat that expands through community transmission demands a sustained and coordinated public effort. Asking citizens to change their social behaviour and alter their way of life for an indefinite length of time is no easy task. One could argue that the success of a public response to the pandemic relies on the clarity of the information communicated and the way in which that information is disseminated to the public. The significance of effective crisis communication has perhaps never been more emphasised in recent history. In this article we will analyse Jacinda Ardern's coronavirus response so that we may extract some preliminary knowledge regarding her approach and shed some light on the more recent practical dimensions of crisis communication. We will analyse the different channels and techniques employed in the implementation of her "Stay home to save lives" campaign. The main objective is to identify the main aspects of Jacinda Ardern's crisis communication strategy and how her discourse adapted to the evolution of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in New Zealand.

Keywords: COVID; crisis; communication; Jacinda Ardern

INTRODUCTION

Over the past year, we have seen governments attempt to contain and prevent the spread of the virus in different ways, and communication approaches have been diverse, yielding different results. New Zealand's Prime Minister has garnered a lot of attention from the international press for her leadership approach and communication style, making headlines thanks to her crisis communication.

The COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing, and epidemiologists have reason to believe that such experiences will become more frequent, as the rate at which outbreaks occur is expected to grow, according to a Harvard Global Health Institute study (World Economic Forum, 2020). Communication plays a key role in the process of managing a crisis, perhaps even more so when we are talking about an epidemic or a pandemic. Public health crises caused by epidemics require a coordinated community effort if they are to be solved efficiently. Without individual commitment to follow a common set of guidelines, government efforts to contain the effects of the crisis may be rendered obsolete.

Jacinda Ardern's "go hard, go early" policy achieved an impressive 80% public support rate according to a 2020 poll, which indicated that citizens were supportive of the government's crisis management (Anna Jones, 2020). In the following pages, we are going to take a closer look at Jacinda Ardern's communication approach.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Crisis communication theoreticians like Timothy Coombs argue that "a crisis or the threat of crisis creates a need for information" (Coombs, 2010, p. 25). One of the defining features of a crisis is its unpredictability, "such a severe disruption of order and sense of normal life that people cannot predict what will happen" (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013, p. 25), being often described as unprecedented "once-in-a-life experiences that have no sensible order or pattern" (*ibidem*) by those immediately affected.

However, despite the preliminary perception of disorder caused by the prevalence of its more visible and novel traits, it could be argued that crises, like many social phenomena, have a discernible pattern of development which can offer possible outcomes based on their underlying structure (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013, p. 25). There are multiple models of crisis development, which attempt to offer a framework of analysis. One of them is the three-stage model, based on the simple classification of crisis stages in pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis. This model, also known as "prevention-response-recovery", seeks to connect the dots between what we know about crisis development and the responses in terms of crisis communication that are best suited for each stage of the crisis.

During the pre-crisis stage, identifying and reducing risk becomes the priority (Coombs, 2010, p. 25) thus prevention and preparation are the

main concerns to be addressed (Heath, 2010, p. 8). When it comes to politicians and their involvement as crisis communicators, their approach should focus on the following aspects: "what is known about the disaster; what is not known; what is being done about it; and what action various publics should take" (McLean, 2020, p. 137).

After the onset of the crisis, communication should focus on the mitigation of the harmful effects, with a focus on sense-making techniques which can be employed to offer information about what is happening and what is to be done (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013, p. 31). Responses should be quick and consistent, because the initial perception of the public might affect their response to subsequent messages (Holladay, 2010, p. 162). Instructing and adjusting information play an important role during the crisis phase, as they deliver essential information that helps dissipate confusion and provide mechanisms of coping with the psychological distress caused by crises, as well as practical advice for physical protection (Holladay, 2010, p. 164).

Some of the actions proposed might not have a demonstratable benefit, at least not immediately, and might appear to be disproportional which is why it is crucial that the reasoning behind each recommendation should be clear and the meaningful, in order to reduce the risk of misinterpretation and confusion (Seeger, 2016, p. 242).

During final stage of the crisis, the information communicated may include retrospective considerations, such as lessons learnt from the crisis, thanking partners who have contributed to the efforts against the pandemic and internalizing information, meant to consolidate the reputation of the actors involved (Lim et al., 2018, p. 262).

As for aspects that should be present throughout the communication process, openness and transparency are often emphasised (Brataas, 2018, p. 77). Brataas stresses that "a crisis always involves victims" and those suffering should be the focus of the crisis communication (Brataas, 2018, p. 78). Emotions matter, as shown in an experiment by Kim and Cameron, which unveiled that the framing of the crisis can influence the public's perception of the situation, the interpretation of the information being communicated, and the behaviour subsequently adopted (Kim & Cameron, 2011, pp. 826-855). Aside from acknowledging the psychological distress the public is facing, the expression of genuine compassion and concern can

provide credibility in the measures being implemented or recommended (Seeger, 2016, pp. 232-244).

Even though political leaders have an important role in diminishing uncertainty, offering meaning making messages and actively communicating during trying times (McLean & Ewart, 2010, p. 9) it is important that they acknowledge the unpredictability endemic to crises and the lack of complete and reliable information especially in its initial stages, resisting the urge to offer overly reassuring and overly confident statements (Seeger, 2016, p. 241). This kind of framing might create false expectations for the public and influence their perception of the real magnitude of the crisis. Rosy forecasts might be tempting for politicians who seek to capitalize on the crisis or maintain a public image, however one could argue that displaying vulnerability can make for a more honest and relatable stance.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

The data analysed was consulted from primary sources that consist of 23 official press conference transcripts and 6 videos posted on Jacinda Ardern's official Facebook page. A secondary analysis of data was also used. The data gathered was interpreted in relation to the context and structured on recurrent themes and patterns of communication identified. The press briefings analysed have been selected from the documents posted on the Government's official site, and the timeframe selected is that of the first COVID-19 wave in New Zealand, between the first confirmed case and the moment when the country had no more active cases, with all but border restrictions being lifted. As this is an ongoing crisis, the analysis of the first wave will allow us to capture all of the phases of the crisis at a smaller scale.

FINDINGS

New Zealand has been praised for its "swift and firm response" that has been implemented "well before the first report of any outbreak in New Zealand" (Cox, 2020, p. 332). Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has also received praise for her empathy and ability to convey purpose in a clear and frequent way which "provides information instead of leaving a

vacuum for others to fill with potential misinformation" (Dirani et al., p. 386).

McGuire et al. have analysed 40 public statements made in March and April 2020, including briefings, parliament speeches, press conferences, and conversations with the Prime Minister.

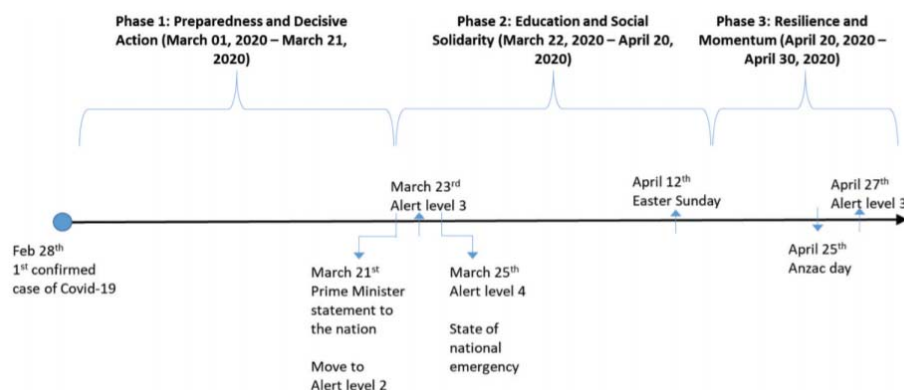


Figure 1: Timeline of the Covid-19 pandemic in New Zealand
(McGuire et al., 2020, p. 367)

During the first days of the crisis Ardern's discourse focused on the principles guiding the decisions of the government, its 'go hard and go early' approach, and the social, economic and health implications likely to arise based on information coming from other countries where the virus had already reached the stage of community transmission (McGuire et al., 2020, p. 368).

We could conclude, based on this model, that between the confirmation of New Zealand's first case and the first cases of community transmission Jacinda Ardern tried to convey two types of information: what was known about the potential threat and what was being done to manage it.

The second phase of the timeline starts with the announcement of the alert level two and the rapid progression to alert level three to four, accompanied by the declaration of a national emergency state ending in

April 20 when some of the restrictions were eased. According to McGuire et al., this phase is best characterized by a containment or damage control approach, where limiting the material and human costs of the crisis were the main concerns and every action announced by the Prime Minister was explained through this perspective, by using kindness, unity and compassion as main discourse themes (McGuire et al., 2020, pp. 369-370).

Between 20 and 30 April 2020 Jacinda's crisis communication is characterized by the effort to ensure public acceptance of restrictions and confidence in the governmental decisions through daily briefings on the evolution of the crisis, with emphasis on setting milestones and expectations, allowing citizens to assess the progress and the success of the actions, thus building public support and confidence (David McGuire et al., 2020, p. 370).

On 17 February 2020, during the post-cabinet press conference, Ardern explained that although there were no cases of infection in New Zealand the decision to extend the restrictions for eight additional days was "best on the best available science and health advice" (New Zealand Government, 17.02.2020). This would be a recurrent theme in her discourses. As there were no active cases in New Zealand at the time of this briefing, Ardern focused on the economic impact of the restrictions and the measures taken to limit this impact for the areas immediately affected by the global health emergency.

The Prime Minister acknowledged that it was too early to predict the impact the virus would have on the country's economy but reassured the public that the situation was under control, explaining that governmental agencies had been "working to understand and mitigate the economic impacts of the virus" (New Zealand Government, 17.02.2020). Although she acknowledged that the evolution of the crisis could not be fully and clearly envisioned, she reassured citizens that the country's economy was "in good shape", that plans to contain the harmful effects of the crisis had been prepared, and the GDP was expected to grow in the second half of the year after an anticipated decline during the first half (New Zealand Government, 17.02.2020).

By presenting the expected long and short-term effects of the crisis as well as the plans put in place to mitigate these effects, Jacinda Ardern offered reassurance and clarity. Her pre-crisis discourse fulfilled two essential tasks. First, it reinforced trust in the government by projecting an

image of preparedness and openness which would facilitate public compliance in the next stages of the crisis. Secondly, it dissipated confusion and re-established a sense of order.

Ardern was not reluctant to admit that the puzzle was not yet complete and further data was needed to have a clear understanding of the crisis, which is in line with the best practices of crisis communication. While being open about the limited data available and avoiding overly reassuring statements, Jacinda Ardern presented her decisions in a clear and concise manner, which allowed her to construct a narrative that framed the situation as under control.

In the press conference held on the 24th of February 2020, the main concerns addressed were those related to public health, which represented a shift from her previous statements that focused more on the immediate consequences of the international situation, namely the economic impact. At the time of this briefing, New Zealand had no active cases within its borders and had only experienced the indirect effects of the global crisis. However, the health aspect of the crisis began to materialize when the first citizens of the country were feared to have been infected after an outbreak had been discovered on the Diamond Princess cruise ship. The outbreak was considered to be the world's biggest cluster of cases outside of China at the time, 542 of the 3,700 passengers and crew members having been infected (Togoh, 2020).

Once it was clear that the crisis was unavoidable, instructing information encouraging social compliance and appropriate behaviours replaced internalizing information as the main category of messages delivered. The Diamond Princess outbreak received a lot of media and public attention, thus the need of complete and accurate information from an official source was heightened. Jacinda Ardern responded to this need by offering details about the actions taken by the government in regard to the six passengers repatriated from Japan and any future cases of this kind. The Prime Minister explained that a quarantine facility had been set for them and that they were closely monitored, along with the 157 citizens previously evacuated from Wuhan (New Zealand Government, 24.02.2020).

Ardern also offered details about the number of clinical equipment resources available, announcing a national supply ready to be deployed in the case of a pandemic, new testing and isolation facilities put in place, negative pressure rooms, special management structures with a specialized

network of ICU directors that would provide guidance for the safety of staff and critically ill patients should any severe cases arise, and the implementation of a dedicated Healthline service with a team responsible for the communication with those in isolation .

Communicating what is known about an impending threat and what is being done to mitigate the associated risks it is a central part of pre-crisis communication. Ardern emphasised the science-based approach of the measures implemented, as well as the steps the government had taken in preparation to the onset of the health crisis on New Zealand's territory:

“Given its spread over approximately 28 countries around the world, it is highly likely that Covid-19 will eventually come to New Zealand, but these preparations mean we will be in a better position when it does” (New Zealand Government, 24.02.2020).

As the health concerns became predominant, the economic impact of the crisis, which was the main subject of her previous public interventions, became a secondary theme of discussion. It has been specified, however, that while the sanitary implications of the crisis were starting to become clear, the scale of its economic impact was difficult to determine. Ardern invited finance Minister Grant Robertson to join her and give more details on matters related to the economy. We can observe here that, while giving detailed explanations on general matters, Ardern refrained from addressing operational issues and instead opted to allow the cabinet member in charge to respond to such questions instead.

During the weekly press conferences, Jacinda was often accompanied by other cabinet members or health officials that offered specific details, and answered questions related to health or other operational aspects. This communication strategy not only reduced the chances of incorrect information being inadvertently shared, thus potentially affecting the perception of her leadership, it also provided the audience with accurate data and specialized health advice.

On 28 February 2020, New Zealand confirmed its first case of COVID-19, becoming the 48th country to register a case of the novel coronavirus (New Zealand's Ministry of Health, 2020). The case was linked to overseas travel, the person infected having recently returned from Iran (New

Zealand Government, 02.03.2020). Given the rapidly changing global context, New Zealand extended travel restrictions for China, Iran and Diamond Princess cruise ship passengers for another seven days, while travellers arriving from Italy and South Korea were asked to self-isolate for 14 days (New Zealand Government, 02.03.2020). Ardern emphasised once again that all of the steps taken were based on science, stating that it was “a balanced precautionary approach that is based on an expert assessment of risk” (New Zealand Government, 02.03.2020).

The public perception toward the government can shape individual behaviour and the willingness to comply to new rules put in place to mitigate the crisis, thus building a positive image before the onset is essential for the country's political leadership. New Zealand's strategy was framed as a success story:

“Today, most people in New Zealand were able to get up and go to work. This is not necessarily the case around the world, certainly not in Italy nor in Spain or other countries that are experiencing massive outbreaks of COVID-19—countries whose economies are, effectively, shutting down. It was with this in mind that we took decisive action at the weekend to go hard and to go early, to prioritise New Zealanders' health by requiring everyone coming into our country, other than those from the Pacific, to self-isolate for 14 days” (New Zealand Government, 16.03.2020).

Until this point, the risk was located outside of New Zealand as the only confirmed case was linked to overseas travel. The Prime Minister maintained that the threat was being managed but pointed out that the situation was evolving at a rapid pace and it was difficult for New Zealand to avoid an outbreak, which is why most of her speeches concentrated on the preventive steps undertaken.

Jacinda Ardern stated that protecting New Zealanders' health and their jobs was the cabinet's main priority and argued that best way to secure the economy for the long term was to decrease transmission as much as possible (New Zealand Government, 16.03.2020). Her post-cabinet press conferences held on the 2nd, the 9th, and 16th of March 2020 focused on health and economic issues, presenting the new information available

linked to these areas of concern and the decisions taken in the weekly cabinet meetings in response to the crisis.

On March 11, The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic (Ducharme, 2020), and 8 days later Jacinda Ardern announced new travel restrictions, this time the borders being closed to anyone who was not a citizen or a permanent resident of the country (Radio New Zealand, 2020). She acknowledged the unprecedented nature of the restrictions, as no other measure of this kind had been taken in the country's history but added that she was not willing to tolerate any risk at the country's borders, which was where the majority of the cases were arriving (Radio New Zealand, 2020).

At the moment of this statement, the threat was mainly an external one, as all of the cases confirmed had been connected to international travel, and it was managed as such. In addition to these extended restrictions, the government adopted a ban on indoor gatherings that were exceeding 100 participants, the decision being announced earlier that day (Radio New Zealand, 2020).

These statements provided the public with information regarding the potential threat, the possible outcomes and actions according to the evolution of the crisis. This kind of information serves a couple of different purposes. First, it helps reduce the uncertainty endemic to crises. Second, it sets expectations and guidelines and reinforces trust in the operational structures of the state by reassuring citizens that the situation is being managed based on a clear vision.

Establishing a unified understanding of the crisis management plan is essential for the coordination of individual efforts. Once the expectations are set and trust is achieved, the transition to the next stage of the crisis should be easier to implement, as the public is already aware of the incoming changes, how these changes will affect them, what the individual responsibilities will be and what personal precautionary measures they can take to mitigate the risk.

CRISIS ONSET

On 21st of March, 13 new cases were confirmed, bringing the total number of cases to 52 (New Zealand's Ministry of Health, 21.03.2020). Most of the cases were linked to international travel, however in two of the 13

new cases confirmed a clear link to overseas travel could not be established, and thus New Zealand's Ministry of Health concluded that community transmission could not be ruled out (New Zealand's Ministry of Health, 21.03.2020). On the same day, a four-level alert system was announced, with the country being placed at alert level two, and people over 70 years old as well as those with compromised immune systems were asked to stay at home as much as possible while non-essential domestic travel was limited (Cheng, 2020). Businesses were asked to reduce interpersonal contact and to implement work from home plans where possible (New Zealand Government, 21.03.2020).

Ardern admitted that closing the borders would have seemed unimaginable before but noted that it was an unprecedented response to an unprecedented event, and the strategy adopted to fight the pandemic was "going hard and going early" (New Zealand Government, 21.03.2020). The Prime Minister empathised with the uncertainty and fear that some would experience: "I understand that all of this rapid change creates anxiety, and uncertainty. Especially when it means changing how we live" (New Zealand Government, 21.03.2020).

She explained that "the vast majority of people who will ever have COVID 19 will only experience mild to moderate symptoms. But there will be some who need more care" (New Zealand Government, 21.03.2020), adding: "That's why we have to focus on one simple goal - to slow down Covid 19" (New Zealand Government, 21.03.2020). The main type of information communicated in this statement has the role of adjusting information, offering the public details that could help alleviate the psychological burden of the crisis by reducing uncertainty, and setting some expectation of how the crisis might progress. Ardern also reinforces the idea that beating the virus entails a common effort, and each individual plays an important part in determining the outcome.

"Slowing it down, means not having one big tidal wave of cases, but instead, smaller waves - groups of cases that we can manage properly as they arise. That means we reduce the impact on health, on jobs and on our economy" (New Zealand Government, 21.03.2020).

This statement provides a meaning and an end-goal for the individual adjustments demanded: reducing the impact of the pandemic on the health, economy and wellbeing of the nation. The anticipated outcomes of the strategy implemented are also presented, with the purpose of dissipating some of the uncertainty and prepare the public for a battle that would resemble a marathon rather than a sprint. The long-term orientation of New Zealand's response strategy has already been mentioned in previous speeches.

Unity is an important motif of Jacinda Ardern's communication, community values being reinforced through her speech:

"For now, I ask that New Zealand does what we do so well. We are a country that is creative, practical, and community minded. We may not have experienced anything like this in our lifetimes, but we know how to really and we know how to look after one another, and right now what could be more important than that" (New Zealand Government, 21.03.2020).

The fight against the virus was once again framed as a collective effort, with an encouraging tone.

The word "we" was used no less than 55 times in this speech, implying a shared reality in which the country's leadership and its followers were on the same side of the front. Ardern concluded her speech by asking New Zealanders to "be strong, be kind, and unite against COVID-19" (New Zealand Government, 21.03.2020), which could summarise the main message of her campaign.

Empathetic statements calling for social solidarity, highlighting the role of every member of the society and emphasising the value of sacrifice for a common good were reinforced thorough informal communication approaches during the six Facebook live sessions where Ardern responded to questions and concerns about Covid-19, after announcing that all government members and public service executives would have their pay reduced by 20% for six months in solidarity to citizens who had their income reduced or lost their jobs as a result of the crisis.

Empathy, solidarity and social responsibility were some key elements of Jacinda Ardern's communication approach. The government as an

institution used this approach in formal statements and documents, such as the New Zealand COVID-19 Alert Levels Summary where the message "Unite against COVID-19" can be found. This strategy is inclusive and stresses the importance of unity. "Be kind, Stay home, Save lives", "Our plan, Your plan", "Check in on the elderly or vulnerable", and "We're a team of 5 million" are phrases that have been widely used by the government in informative materials (de Freitas, 2020).

Inspiring inclusivity and collective responsibility seem to be an integrated part of the government's communication strategy. The information is communicated in a simple, straightforward, and empathetic manner. The guidelines for the four-level alert system are presented in a clear and concise language and provide both directions and meaning, which allows the institution to frame the measures proposed as efficient and achievable as members of the community learn how the response strategy will affect them, what their individual responsibilities are and what the purpose of said the measures is.

Collective responsibility and the purpose of social distancing were underlined on multiple occasions, mainly through simple, directive messages:

- "Your job is to save lives, and you can do that by staying home and breaking the chain" (New Zealand Government, 25.03.2020)
- "remember to be calm, be kind, stay at home. We can break the chain" (New Zealand Government, 25.03.2020)
- "stay at home; staying at home will save lives" (New Zealand Government, 25.03.2020)
- "reduce contact, reduce risk, reduce the spread" (New Zealand Government, 24.03.2020)
- "we will only be able to do this if we do it together" (New Zealand Government, 26.03.2020)
- "stay home, break the chain, and save lives" (New Zealand Government, 27.03.2020)
- "stay at home. Only go out if you need to. When you do, stay local." (New Zealand Government, 01.04.2020)
- "Keep 2 metres apart from others. Stick only to your bubble, and act like you have the virus" (New Zealand Government, 01.04.2020)

At this stage it is important that any desired behaviours or guidelines are presented in a clear and practical way, since individuals will be reluctant to follow any advice that is not perceived as efficient or achievable (Coombs, 2009, p. 27). Jacinda Ardern's guidelines, as we can note from the examples mentioned above, are consistent, often worded similarly, and do not present contradictions, which can help create a clearer image of the rules that individuals are asked to abide to.

As we have already noted, Ardern attaches a meaning to all of these requests, and most of the time that meaning is oriented to a positive outcome, namely saving lives. However, she sometimes uses a negative possible outcome, as it is the case in the following instance:

"if you have any questions about what you can or can't do and you're looking for answers, apply a simple principle: act like you have COVID-19. Every move you make could be a risk to someone else. That is how we must all collectively think now" (New Zealand Government, 25.03.2020).

It is worth emphasizing that Jacinda Ardern not only provides clear direction and meaning, but also a collective vision and shares the principles behind every advice or requirement with the public, while expressing consideration in regard to the burden of the life-altering demands made by her government.

Asking citizens to alter their way of life is not the easiest message to deliver, and Jacinda Ardern has acknowledged that what was asked of the population was unprecedented. She also recognized the uncertainty and anxiety caused by the new way of life:

- "I know there continue to be questions, and they are understandable" (New Zealand Government, 24.03.2020)
- "We have never shut down our country before; so I will ask people to work with us as we go through this unprecedented step" (New Zealand Government, 24.03.2020)
- "an unprecedented lockdown of our country, in order to combat an unprecedented virus that, left unchecked, would have an unacceptable toll on New Zealanders" (New Zealand Government, 25.03.2020)

In motivating the sacrifice demanded from the public, the Prime Minister primarily uses the expected consequences in a scenario where no action is taken, building on the science-based approach that we have analysed in the pre-crisis phase:

“We could allow a wave of devastation to hit us, like it has in other countries, or we could take decisive, pre-emptive action by going hard and early into lockdown to stop the spread of the disease in its tracks. We chose action, and the indications at this stage are promising. We will never know what if we’d taken the first path, but the projections were for thousands of deaths if the virus got away on us, many more sick and in hospital, and the country and our economy grinding to a halt regardless” (New Zealand Government, 16.04.2020).

Saving lives and a faster economic recovery and saving are the main arguments used to convince the audience to continue following the rules. Ardern repeatedly stated that the best strategy for the economy was to control the outbreak:

- “Our best economic strategy is still to win the fight against the virus—eliminate it—and that means we get out of prolonged restrictions on the way we live our lives sooner, and move business into recovery sooner” (New Zealand Government, 16.04.2020).
- “The best economic response continues to be a strong health response” (New Zealand Government, 09.04.2020).
- “I continue to be very aware that this is a challenge unlike any other we have faced, but rest assured, if we continue as we are, continuing applying the rules, then that gives us the best hope of being able to move into different alert levels” (New Zealand Government, 1.04.2020).

Resilience is fostered through the perspective of a future reward for all of the efforts, and the consequences of not following the rules are mostly framed through the outcome of a prolonged lockdown with added pressure on the economy, and the loss of human lives. The punitive actions taken against those who decide to break the rules are not as often mentioned. In

the press conference organized on March 30, Ardern once again stressed on the concept of responsibility, stating that “unfortunately, there are some people who are failing to act responsibly” (New Zealand Government, 30.03.2020). She then added:

“I want to say very clearly: the police are geared up around enforcement, and they have been and will continue to act. This is not a time to look for ways out. It is not a time to bend the rules. This is a time to stay at home and to save lives” (New Zealand Government, 30.03.2020).

On April 9 New Zealand reported the lowest number of cases since the 23rd of March, before the lockdown, thanking New Zealanders for their efforts and congratulating the country for successfully breaking the chain of transmission and implementing a “nationwide wall of defence” (Radio New Zealand, 2020). On 16 April, Jacinda Ardern described the move to level three and the end of the lockdown” (Radio New Zealand, 2020) with a degree of caution warning that everyone needed to continue to follow guidelines and that it was too soon to relax yet as there was “still a high risk the virus can get out of control and bounce back” (New Zealand Government, 16.04.2020).

With the gradual transition to level three on the 28th of April and level two on 12 May, it was deemed essential that rules continued to be followed strictly for the efforts made up to that stage not to have been in vain:

- “we all have a responsibility to make this new phase of our COVID response work, Please, continue to act like you have the virus when you’re out (...) The last thing we can afford is a spike in cases due to taking our foot off the pedal, and, as has been reported today, we do still have cases that are coming through. And so now is not the time to loosen up our compliance” (New Zealand Government, 30.04.2020).
- “stay the course. We cannot afford to squander the good work to date when our end goal is so close and within reach” (New Zealand Government, 04.05.2020)
- “we need to not get ahead of ourselves, stick to our bubble, and to finish the job that we’ve started” (New Zealand Government, 04.05.2020).

- "we know the virus can have a long tail, and that other cases can pop up; so, as we (...) head towards the level 3 review next week, my message remains: don't do anything that snatches our potential victory at this point" (New Zealand Government, 05.05.2020).
- "stay strong, stay home, be kind, and let's finish what we started" (New Zealand Government, 20.04.2020).
- "as restrictions have been relaxed in other countries around the world, the virus has had the opportunity to bounce back, and in some places it has. Ultimately, we need to stay in control" (New Zealand Government, 07.05.2020).
- "every alert level, therefore, has its own battle, and even when you win one, it doesn't mean that the war is over (...) If stray cases start new chains of transmission, we might not find them for a month, so we all have to stay on guard" (New Zealand Government, 07.05.2020).

The consequences of lifting the restrictions prematurely, along with a reinforced importance of responsibility, were coupled with encouraging messages and praise for the results achieved:

- "But I do want to say thank you for your efforts, and I know New Zealanders will continue to keep acting together to stay safe" (New Zealand Government, 19.04.2020).
- "if anything, the last few months have shown us that united, we are formidable force" (New Zealand Government, 13.05.2020)
- "we have done what very few countries have been able to do. We have done what very few countries have been able to do. We have stopped a wave of devastation" (New Zealand Government, 20.04.2020)
- "the effort of our team of 5 million has broken the chain of transmission and taken a quantum leap forward in our goal to eliminate the virus" (New Zealand Government, 20.04.2020)
- "You – all of you – have stopped the uncontrolled explosion of COVID-19 in New Zealand, and I couldn't feel prouder of the start that we have made together" (New Zealand Government, 20.04.2020)

Jacinda Ardern generally chose to end her speeches by recognizing the contribution of a certain group and thanking the members of said group for

their merits and role in the successful management of the crisis. The group mentioned was different in each speech, for instance she mentioned supermarket workers, the medical and nursing workforce, the cleaning staff, sign language interpreters, police forces and others.

She mentioned that she was aware of the pain that many citizens were feeling, stating that she read messages and stories about those who lost loved ones and could not gather to grieve for them, and that she was aware of the concerns many were experiencing in regard to their livelihoods as over 1 million people relied on wage subsidy (New Zealand Government, 09.04.2020).

When New Zealand reported its first coronavirus-related death, she expressed her sadness towards the unfortunate event and reemphasised the importance of protecting those vulnerable, saying that it was critical for everyone to stay at home in order to offer elderly New Zealanders as much protection as possible, and that physical distance was their protective shield, while asking everyone to offer support and kindness to those who had the disease or were battling it, expressing her concern for stigma and reminding the public that everyone could be affected by the virus (New Zealand Government, 29.03.2020).

TRANSITION

As the number of cases continued to decline, her public statements started to focus on the achievements of the country as well as the losses suffered by its citizens, which demonstrated her empathy and understanding of the reality the public experienced. In a speech delivered three days before the country moved to alert level two, she stated:

“our team of 5 million has united to beat the virus and must keep doing so, and now, together, we can also unite to build our economy, and that there is an opportunity to build back even better” (New Zealand Government, 11.05.2020).

If we were to summarize the key aspects addressed at the end stage of the first COVID-19 wave in two words, it would be rebuilding and recovery. Jacinda Ardern spoke extensively about future recovery plans, the economic opportunities that stemmed from the successful management

of the crisis, a possible trans-Tasman bubble (New Zealand Government, 13.05.2020), about tourism and trade opportunities and about life under alert level 1, with the economy and jobs being the main subject matter. While highlighting that the future was still uncertain, she underlined the fact that the country had a clear plan and the success of the previous experience was a promising indicator for future challenges (New Zealand Government, 13.05.2020).

On the 8th of June, the Ministry of Health reported that the country no longer had any active case, and so most of the restrictions placed on domestic travel, schools, sports, and gatherings could be lifted, while border restrictions with a 14-day managed quarantine or isolation were to remain in place (Radio New Zealand, 2020). As the situation was brought under control, Ardern declared that should the country be experiencing one or two cases in the future, which was always possible due to the international situation and the nature of the crisis, those cases would need to be isolated immediately in order to keep the country at a low alert level and prevent another lockdown (New Zealand Government, 08.06.2020).

A lot of attention was dedicated to the efforts of New Zealanders and the evaluation of the crisis management plan. Ardern argued that “New Zealanders did something remarkable in our fight to beat COVID-19” (New Zealand Government, 08.06.2020). We can notice how internalizing information regained the spotlight. New Zealand’s leader not only made an evaluation of the way the situation was managed, but also thanked the public for their contribution:

“Our lockdown was in place 26 days after our first case, when we had just over 200 cases. Google tracking showed that, during our lockdown, New Zealanders massively reduced their movements by 91 percent to retail and recreation—better than Australia, the UK, the United States, and nearly every other place we have compared ourselves to. Had we not acted, 11 days into our lockdown we were projected to have 4,000 cases; we had 1,000, and one of lowest rates per-capita in the world. That was what the sacrifice of our team of 5 million was for: to keep one another safe, and to keep one another well—and, as much

as we could, we have” (New Zealand Government, 08.06.2020).

Consolidating trust and the government’s reputation based on this preliminary success was essential, given the fact that the threat was still present and it retained its potential of re-escalating. As Jacinda Ardern herself pointed out, just because one battle had been won it did not mean that the war was over. Bringing the count of active cases to 0 after the successful implementation of the first wave of infections could convince the public to follow future response strategies elaborated by the country’s leadership. Once the public perceived the government’s response as reliable, compliance with the rules of a new lockdown or additional restrictions could be more easily achieved.

It is probably not by coincidence that Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern repeatedly mentioned these achievements. By presenting the results and comparing them with a statistical projection of the results that were likely in a situation where no response had been implemented, it could be argued that Jacinda Ardern attempted to consolidate the image of her cabinet, as the public’s trust in her leadership could affect the commitment and willingness of the citizens to follow future guidelines.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Jacinda Ardern has been named The Facebook prime minister by marketing scholar Sommer Kapitan, who argues that Ardern has become “New Zealand’s most successful political influencer” (Kapitan, 2020). According to Kapitan, Ardern “speaks directly into her phone at day’s end, in a comfortable sweatshirt and with tousled hair, inviting Instagram viewers into her home as she lays out plans for the week ahead (...) she is candid, approachable, tired and funny” (*ibidem*). Ardern is positive, unfiltered, authentic and consistent with her communication, this type of short informal Facebook videos have been a constant ever since the 2017 elections (*ibidem*).

Ardern has been hailed as “New Zealand’s most eminent political influencer” and she is so popular that the term *Jacindamania* emerged (Goeron, 2021). New Zealand’s Prime Minister is a charismatic speaker, but the defining feature of her leadership is empathy and Jacinda Herself has

stated that if she could reduce the approach pursued by New Zealand to one defining concept, it would be kindness (*ibidem*).

Mia Garlick, the Director of Policy for Facebook in Australia and New Zealand stated that "the top posts from the most-engaged NZ politicians on Instagram show that relatability and behind-the-scenes moments are key on Instagram" (NZ Herald, 2020). "We've seen New Zealanders use Facebook and Instagram to engage in the 2014 and 2017 elections to share their opinions, connect with their candidates, and engage with the electoral process" (*ibidem*), she added. This highlights the engagement of New Zealanders on social media platforms, and the type of content they are the most receptive to.

Ardern's social media presence seems to almost deliberately cater to this preference as her social media strategy combines the personal and professional aspects of her life (Verma Jagruti, 2020). She often shares glimpses of her work behind the scenes and publishes pictures of mundane aspects of her day, documenting her life as a government official and working mom in a natural and amusing manner, all of which makes her relatable (*ibidem*). Jacinda Ardern was the most frequently mentioned politician in New Zealand across Instagram and Facebook, generating the highest number of engagements ahead of the 2020 elections (NZ Herald, 2020).

Social media sites are popular communication channels that help politicians communicate with the public. Jacinda Ardern seems to be perfectly aware of their importance, as all official press conferences were broadcast on her Facebook page as well. Not only did she use her platform to make these statements available for the social media public, she also started to regularly hold short live videos where she would present the main information shared during the official press conferences for those who had missed them or had answers regarding the updates previously stated, while she scrolled through the comments and answered questions and concerns raised by viewers.

Between 25 March 2020, when the state of emergency was declared, and June 8th, when the country reached 0 active cases and started preparing for the transmission to alert level one, Jacinda Ardern held 16 live broadcasts which were on average 10 to 15 minutes long. She also launched a podcast called "Conversations Through COVID-19" which numbered five episodes and included conversations with experts in different fields.

I have analysed six of her live Facebook broadcasts and concluded that Jacinda Ardern approached the public in a reassuring and hopeful manner, while trying to present the situation as accurately as possible. These informal broadcasts completed her formal speeches and offered additional clarifications while allowing her to communicate directly with her followers. Pullen and Vachhani note that she is “repeatedly open, honest and authentic in her reporting” (Pullen & Vachhani, 2021).

In the live video broadcast posted on March the 25th, Jacinda Ardern addressed some of the most pressing issues and questions that the audience mentioned, and this type of communication is more direct, essentially constituting a dialogue with the public, whereas the relationship with the public was mediated by the press in the case of her official live addresses. This particular video has gathered so far more than 5.5 million views and more than 46.000 comments. We can conclude that the content was quite compelling and engaging for New Zealanders.

Apart from the general instructions and information related to the crisis, she often shares small personal details, which made her seem relatable and genuine: "Excuse the casual attire, it can be a messy business putting toddlers to bed so I'm not in my work clothes" (Jacinda Ardern Facebook live, 1:18, 25 March 2020), she said during one of her live broadcasts.

While she does not use humour during her formal COVID-19 updates and press briefings, she does use it in her social media interactions. For instance, Ardern ended her first lockdown live by saying that “you’ll going to be seeing a lot of me over the next 4 weeks. I probably will drive you a bit mad by being so present” (*ibidem*, 15:51).

Another distinctive aspect of her social media communication is the direct engagement with the public, and not only by answering questions from the comments section, but by employing a direct and personal approach, with phrases such as “you may recall” or “you might have seen that” being used often. She often asked people to be kind to themselves and others, encouraging the viewers to take care of themselves on multiple occasions.

CONCLUSIONS

While the content of her discourse adapted according to the evolution of the crisis, her messages were frequent, clear and consistent, combining

instructive information with meaning, and framing the response to the crisis as a team effort. Ardern explained the implications, expected outcomes and reasoning behind each decision while acknowledging individual efforts and sacrifices. Responsibility, unity and care were the main discourse theme. Accuracy is another defining aspect of her approach, as Ardern was often being joined by experts during her briefings, for more detailed information, while a lot of emphasis was placed on the scientific based of the crisis management plan.

Ardern used both formal and informal, traditional and new media channels to communicate with the public. She inspired trust by being honest about the lack of information concerning the virus at the beginning of the crisis and refrained from being overly reassuring when presenting promising results once the crisis was contained. Her approach was empathetic but decisive, open, people-oriented and science-based, framed in an inclusive, long-term vision.

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CHINA V. THE USA IN HANDLING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: CAUTION AND DENIAL

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ABSTRACT: The current global situation of the COVID-19 pandemic seems to be improving as the vaccination of the people has started in numerous countries and countless strategies regarding our return to the normal way of life are being proposed daily. Believing that society is, slowly but surely, willing past these uncertain times and heading towards a long-awaited recovery, the world is looking back at the losses suffered and the gains obtained during the pandemic. There is no use in denying that this is a crisis that has caught most states by surprise. Consequently, the way the situation was handled changes from state to state, and the gravity of the pandemic in each country has been influenced a great deal by the reaction of the authorities and the people in a position of power. This paper's goal is to critically assess and compare how China and the USA, two states that have made the headlines numerous times during the last year due to their administration of the pandemic, have handled this issue. From discourse analysis to crisis management, we strive to underline differences and similarities between the two global actors concerning how the virus has been regarded and fought.

Keywords: Sino-US relations; Coronavirus; Conflict politics; Crisis management; Trade war

INTRODUCTION

A little more over a year has passed since the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus, which has produced great amounts of distress globally and has managed to damage the political, economic, and social sector to an extent from which it has become difficult to imagine a swift recovery. Amidst this constant public unrest, the international scene keeps hosting the historical rivalry between China and the USA, two of the most powerful world

leaders. This pandemic has surely uncovered multiple deficiencies in various infrastructures and has shed light on problems immediately concerning the handling of the virus such as the scientific, economic, and healthcare systems, and on issues adjacent to organizing life in an online environment. This paper seeks to discuss the importance of the two countries in managing this health crisis, focusing on their dynamic and the way each of them has chosen to respond to this outbreak. Since December 2019, when the first cases of Covid-19 were confirmed in the Chinese province of Wuhan, the world has witnessed more failures than successes in what concerns the containment of the virus. Citizens have watched and endured the consequences brought on by the actions of world and organization leaders. What this article aims to achieve is a truthful description of a year marked by a merciless pandemic in which both China and the US have followed very different tactics in dealing with the spread of the Sars-Cov-2 virus and have consequentially attained mismatched results. By critically describing two very different political models, it is in this paper's greatest interest to determine what some of the more unsuccessful politics and strategies applied by each government have been, what the key elements that determined the cohesion of each nation were, and what stand is taken now, after a year of battling this pandemic. Additionally, the particular US-China relation will be discussed outside the pandemic context and some of their ongoing divergencies will be objectively depicted. Aside from the aforementioned subjects, this paper will follow the development of the pandemic from the citizens's viewpoint, revealing two perspectives of the issue – the government and the governed.

OPPOSED CRISIS MANAGEMENT METHODS

The end of 2019 brought the beginning of the novel virus that would come to change people's lives unimaginably. The celebration of the New Year promised to be the last unrestricted festivity for a while, however, at the time, this issue was still treated as a possibility, not an imminent threat. Almost a month after, China commenced the lockdowns, which were to be implemented at a worldwide level as the virus spread slowly, but surely around the globe. To assure a sound understanding of the base concept, it is essential to succinctly explain the implications of the renowned Covid-19 virus. SARS-Cov-2 (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2) is quite a simple virus, biologically speaking. However, the deviousness of

this disease has been demonstrated through its astonishing speed of spreading, aided by an ever-moving world. At its core, this respiratory disease should not require special medical help, but those with underlying health problems have been warned about the danger of contracting the virus. The cunning disease can often pass off as the flu or progress at a rapid pace that leaves the patient unable to defend themselves using an already weak and damaged immunity system. It has been affirmed multiple times that despite having a list of common symptoms there is no assurance of how the virus may react as it all depends on the infected person. What has baffled scientists and leaders alike has been the possibility of a person having no symptoms but being just as successful in spreading the virus to others.⁸³

At first sight, the disease was described by the Chinese authorities as a mystery pulmonary illness. From the end of 2019 and all through the first month of 2020, when the number of cases started to become worryingly high, the Chinese government focused on thorough investigations to determine the danger this disease posed. Unsurprisingly, the city of Wuhan was subjected to strict regulations and tough enforcement tactics as it became deserted, and 11 million people were subjected to rules such as social distancing measures, mask-wearing requirements, and limited public outings. The Chinese government mobilized all of its resources to speed the protective gear production rate and the construction of 14 hospitals in approximately 10 days to ease the pressure on the overwhelmed health-care system, achievements at which the world looked with envy and hope alike. The development of the pandemic made it obligatory for China to continue to implement the same severe protective procedures in cities like Beijing and Shanghai. While China was accused by its international counterparts and by its citizens of being less than transparent in regularly relaying concrete data, the first few days after the lockdown were marked by the president's blatant absence, as he was believed to be hiding from further scrutiny of the citizens and other states. Despite the employment of censoring mechanisms against the desperate and confused population,

⁸³ Mosley, Michael, 2020, *Covid-19: What You Need to Know about the Coronavirus and the Race for the Vaccine*, Short Books, Great Britain, pp. 5-11.

China represents one of the few victors of the battle with the Coronavirus, attainment received through cooperation and strictness.⁸⁴

Keeping in mind China's successful management of the pandemic, the comparison with the USA, the biggest powerhouse on the international scene was inescapable. As the two greatest global economies are in a continuous struggle for influence and a tight race for economic superiority, this security crisis could have only brought them closer or further driven them apart. As opposed to China's quick response to the first confirmed cases of the virus, the Trump administration is known for downplaying the effects of the pandemic, determining the US to become the state with most Coronavirus cases and most deaths in the world. Earlier reports, which unveiled Trump's flagrant dismissal of the pandemic despite the warnings he had been dealt, emerged during the former president's 2020 presidential campaign, which was conducted in an environment unrespecting of any kind of health regulation. Alongside adopting a political view on a health care issue, Trump's actions pointed to the ultimately unsuccessful strategy of using the pandemic to fulfill the US's own economic objectives. His contradictory statements were confusing for the people as they started to wonder if the situation was as controlled as Trump affirmed back at the beginning of the pandemic. While describing the virus as being "a very tricky one", he reinforced the idea that wearing protective gear in public spaces was a mere recommendation. Kamala Harris, the current Vice-President of the US, has said about Trump's continuously incongruous statement:

"This is the same man, Donald Trump, who for days, weeks, if not months thereafter calls it a hoax, dismissed the seriousness of it to the point he suggested people should not wear masks."⁸⁵

The efforts made by the Trump administration to create a sense of normalcy have been shattered by the news of the President being infected

⁸⁴ BBC.com, 2020, *Wuhan coronavirus: From silent streets to packed pools*, Online: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-53816511#16166312349982> , accessed: 21 March 2021.

⁸⁵ Politico.com. 2020, *What did Trump know and when did he know it? Inside his Feb. 7 admission*, Online: <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/09/10/trump-coronavirus-bob-woodward-412222> , accessed: 21 March 2021.

with the fabled Covid-19 virus. His esteemed position as the leader of the state offered Trump the opportunity of receiving fast and effective treatment, only for him to come back to the White House and assure everyone that it was not that severe of an illness. Many seemed to be doubtful of his nonchalance as the medicaments he was administered gave away the seriousness of the situation. Having seen the presidential campaign unfold, later on, it was clear that contracting the disease had raised the levels of skepticism towards the ability of the Trump administration to safely handle the pandemic. A direct consequence was Trump's loss of the elections in favor of the current American President, Joe Biden, who is expected to implement measures to curve the rising number of cases.⁸⁶

There is an obvious contrast between the two nations in what concerns their cultural, political, and economic characteristics. It was the conviction of the Chinese that saw restrictions in Wuhan being lifted completely in June of 2020 and it was the ignorance of the American leadership that had the US stuck in a state of disorder, confusion, and uncertainty about the outcome of the pandemic. With rising levels of globalization, these opposed results can only be the culmination of different behaviors towards a universally damaging virus. This crisis was the signal the world needed to begin a process of development and stabilization as the states should be able to tackle in time these issues that might appear without notice. Undeniably, China and the US have become examples of success and failure in handling the pandemic as the world continues to look intently upon their evolution.

TENSE POLITICS

Given today's heightened level of cooperation between states and the increasing inclination to develop favorable international dynamics, it is only expected from the USA and China, two of the most powerful global players, to have an external policy that is germane to fruitful joint actions. However, these two states have a particular rapport that encompasses both the initiative to collaborate and the strive to surpass one another in what concerns worldwide influence. Being the focal point of international

⁸⁶ Coaston, Jane, 2020, *How the Trump campaign is trying to dig its way out of Trump's Covid-19 diagnosis*, Online: <https://www.vox.com/2020/10/6/21498753/trump-covid-19-election-polls>, accessed: 21 March 2021.

relations, at least since the beginning of the 21st century, opinions on the two powers' relations have been polarized – some believing that these two nations are destined to remain in a perpetual conflict and some advocating that it is not necessary for the states to always clash.⁸⁷ Characterized by their continuous dilemmas, the Sino-US relations are marked by distrust and tension, products of both actors' strategical responses to one another. This subchapter attempts to assess the way in which the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the relations between these two countries, while also analyzing the approach each state took when conducting international relations.

After the Covid-19 virus arose in the Wuhan province of Hubei Province at the end of 2019 and managed to spread around the world in less than three months, life was reshaped completely as world leaders scrambled to find the most efficient way to protect their states from the rapidly spreading disease. Media outlets were flooded with numerous news about the ruthless pandemic and people were experiencing the first lockdown of the century. One of the consequences this pandemic had on a geopolitical level was showing nations that certain improvements were necessary and that, unfortunately, they were lacking in some aspects at the moment the virus struck. It was not just the health care system that was affected by a rapidly sweeping virus, but the economic sector was heavily damaged in all parts of the world, politics were suddenly shaped by the phenomenon of “mask diplomacy”, which later transformed into “vaccine diplomacy”, and the civil society was left to fend for itself in states that failed to provide them with financial help and security. These staggering changes seeped into the foundations of states and produced more damage than anyone was expecting, and now, as the world sheepishly enters a state of recovery, these changes are increasingly visible. In times like these, the situation is mostly impacted by political leaders and it is them who have the power and the influence to differentiate success from failure.⁸⁸

In the past couple of years, the relations between the US and China have been the center of attention in international dynamics, mostly because

⁸⁷ Bernadette Nadya Jaworsky, Runya Qiaoan, 2020, The Politics of Blaming: the Narrative Battle between China and the US over COVID-19 in *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, Online: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-020-09690-8>, accessed: 21 March 2021.

⁸⁸ Jean-François, Caron, 2021, *A Sketch of the World After the COVID-19 Crisis: Essays on Political Authority, The Future of Globalization, and the Rise of China*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 7-9.

of their rigid cooperation which seemed shallow and fleeting. The 2010s have brought a clear change in the foreign policy of the United States, as it experienced a clear shift towards Asian countries and especially China. Surpassing Japan's economy in 2011, China went on to become the second most powerful economic actor in the world, while remaining a developing country. This was the starting point of the China-US trade tensions, which remain a debated subject nowadays, despite the life-threatening pandemic. If during Barack Obama's presidency, the economic tensions and trade deficits were more or less enveloped by good-faith diplomacy that promoted fair and efficient cooperation in other areas such as climate change, Trump's presidential term can be described as a period when the US governance proved that the well-being of their economic situation was a priority.⁸⁹ In the scope of providing a background for the current Sino-US relationship, it is only fit to outline the development of the infamous trade war between the two superpowers. The 2017 Mar-a-Lago summit showed President Donald J. Trump to be a cooperative person and an open business partner inclined towards nonconflictual relations and mutually beneficial situations. However, in 2018, the Trump administration applied extensive tariffs on Chinese imports that amounted to no less than \$50 billion in light of the growing trade deficit the US was suffering from and the intellectual theft allegations against China. These tariffs extended to more than 800 imported Chinese goods, that ranged from machinery and mechanical appliances to vehicles and metals, which Trump justified as means to stop the transfer of American intellectual property to China and to protect American jobs.⁹⁰ To the skeptical opinions about his economic strategy, the US president explained his reasoning through the Twitter social media application by saying "Trade wars are good and easy to win." Consequentially, China was prompted to retaliate with its own tariffs on US imports which equaled the damage that the American state had caused the Chinese economy. The goods on which the tariffs were placed went beyond vehicles and aircraft and affected everything from vegetables to plastic, textiles, and food.⁹¹ This was the course of action which the states

⁸⁹ Council on Foreign Relations, 2021, *U.S. Relations With China*, Online: <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-relations-china>, accessed: 21 March 2021.

⁹⁰ BBC.com, 2018, *Trump puts 25% tariff on Chinese goods*, Online: <https://bbc.in/313xsM2>, accessed: 21 March 2021.

⁹¹ Evelyn Cheng, 2018, *China announces retaliatory tariffs on \$34 billion worth of US goods, including agriculture products*, Online: <https://www.cnn.com/2018/06/15/china->

had been employing lately. Before the Coronavirus was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization, Trump's last year of presidency began with the "phase one" trade deal, in which China agreed to buy \$200 billion worth of American goods and services until 2021. Surprisingly enough, China has not been able to fulfill its part of the agreement, falling almost 40 percent short of meeting the target, which may not be necessarily its fault. American exports have failed to reach the preset standard for manufacturing, which suffered a continuous decrease every year. As the Biden administration seeks to create its own agenda and strategies for the upcoming term, their analysis of Trump's "phase one" deal proves to have been less successful than the former president would have wished.⁹²

These economic divergencies between the two states extended towards the technological sector, as Trump inflicted visible damage on the evolution of Chinese technology. As part of the extensive politicization of the pandemic, this Sino-US conflict had at its core allegations of Chinese espionage. President Trump's deflecting mechanism from the domestic issues US was facing aimed to harm Chinese technological companies under the alleged reason of wanting the US to become the leading 5G power and to continue to develop in that aspect. Huawei was one of the biggest companies harmed by Trump's administration as their US technology supply was baselessly cut. This measure injured the company's 5G business even in Europe, where several countries have imposed restrictions on Huawei's participation in their telecommunication networks. Later on, China was dealt another blow from the US when the bans spread over to Chinese social media apps TikTok and WeChat, considered to be a threat to the national security of the state. During these allegations, the Chinese officials were trying to manage the damage by quickly focusing on other technological sectors which they could expand in and develop, one example being the domestic chip industry.⁹³ The

announces-retaliatory-tariffs-on-34-billion-worth-of-us-goods-including-agriculture-products.html, accessed: 21 March 2021.

⁹² Djoomart Otorbaev, 2021, *Trump's trade war a disaster for US*, Online: <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202103/19/WS6053e2aba31024ad0bab0216.html>, accessed: 21 March 2021.

⁹³ Paul Scanlan, 2020, *Op-ed: Trump's campaign against Huawei, Chinese tech will backfire*, Online: <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/09/09/op-ed-trumps-campaign-against-huawei-chinese-tech-will-backfire.html>, accessed: 21 March 2021.

government in China did not remain silent in refuting the accusation made by their US counterparts. During a press conference in August 2020, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian shared his opinion on the actions of the Trump administration: "What the US has done shows clearly that the market economy and fair competition principle it claims to champion is nothing but a fig leaf."⁹⁴

The Sino-US dynamic was also heavily influenced by each state's response to the pandemic and by the image they succeeded to create at a global level during the first month of the Covid-19 crisis. If China acted quickly in implementing safety measures meant to contain the virus as much as possible, the US failed to recognize the importance of the issue and thus, took action only when it became imperative to do so. By placing the rhetoric of both presidents into the context of international relations, the level of bilateral and global cooperation each of the countries employed throughout the pandemic becomes obvious. As soon as the National Health Commission in China confirmed its first cases of Covid-19 and saw the rapid increase in the rate of infection, the governance acted quickly and cohesively to control the pandemic, which only proved the ethic and rigorousness with which both the political and science sector collaborated.⁹⁵ In the US, the danger of the Covid-19 virus was dismissed until it was too late to try to contain it or to prepare for it. Moreover, several reports from the US intelligence and the American researchers at the World Health Organization claimed that the Trump administration was aware of the virus since 2019, even though the possibility of an air-born disease endangering the world had been on the presidential agenda since last century and the feasible methods of managing such a crisis were discussed and renewed at the beginning of every presidential term until the 45th president assumed office. The consequences of the disinterested attitude concerning this matter of security were visible in the surge of coronavirus cases, which made the US become the country with the highest number of

⁹⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic in China, 2020, *Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian's Regular Press Conference on August 18, 2020*, Online: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1807193.shtml, accessed: 21 March 2021.

⁹⁵ P. Liu, X. Zhong, S. Yu, 2020, *Striking a balance between science and politics: understanding the risk-based policy-making process during the outbreak of COVID-19 epidemic in China* in *Journal of Chinese Governance*, Online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23812346.2020.1745412>, accessed: 21 March 2021, pp. 3-5.

new Covid-19 cases daily by November 2020. This outcome brought not only a lot of criticism on the global political scene but harmed the entirety of the United States in a way that promised a more difficult recovery than others.⁹⁶

At first, Trump did not hesitate to publicly praise the Chinese response to the pandemic, writing a Twitter post on January 24th, in which he affirmed that “China has been working very hard to contain the Coronavirus. The United States greatly appreciates their efforts and transparency.” Later on, in February, there were multiple times when the US president supported his Chinese counterpart, saying that “He (President Xi) is doing a very good job with a very tough situation.” This diplomatic encouragement and distant approval did not hinder Trump from completely changing his message towards China once the first cases of the virus were confirmed in the US.⁹⁷ He continuously referred to Sars-Cov-2 as the “Chinese virus”, which he insisted was not a racial slur, in response to the accusations of Chinese officials and many other US politicians, including the current president of the United States, Joe Biden. Suddenly, the hard-working and prepared Asian state became the source of all problems and the main actor to be blamed for the damage caused by the pandemic. Trump accused China of withholding useful information about the disease and of being careless by letting international flights leave the state around the Chinese New Year. “The world is paying a very big price for that they did,” said Trump, in what concerns China’s delayed communication with the other state actors. Many understood Trump’s continuous attacks as a way to mask his administration’s misgivings and inactions. This was also a subject that sparked very heated arguments during the 2020 presidential debate when Biden used Trump’s mismanagement of the pandemic and his constantly contradictory statements to manipulate in his favor an already dramatically declining support for the president at the time.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Isaac Scher, 2020, *US researchers at the WHO told Trump administration about coronavirus in 2019, report says*, Online: <https://www.businessinsider.com/american-researchers-warned-trump-admin-about-coronavirus-last-year-2020-4>, accessed: 21 March 2021.

⁹⁷ Jennifer Hansler, 2020, *The many times Trump has praised China's handling of the coronavirus pandemic*, Online: <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/21/politics/trump-china-praise-coronavirus-timeline/index.html>, accessed: 21 March 2021.

⁹⁸ Bernadette Nadya Jaworsky, Runya Qiaoan, 2020, *The Politics of Blaming: the Narrative Battle between China and the US over COVID-19 in The Journal of Chinese Political Science*, Online: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-020-09690-8>, accessed: 21 March 2021.

By pointing out the concrete rapport between the two most powerful world leaders at the UN General Assembly from September 2020, a deeper understanding of their dynamic is to be achieved. The President of the United States began his speech by urging people to look forward to a fast economic recovery, more efficient cooperation, and general prosperity. However, the speech soon transformed into grave reproaches and calls to action against China. He said: "We must hold accountable the nation which unleashed this plague on to the world – China." There were multiple accounts, this one included, in which the former US president went as far as to accuse the World Health Organization of having close ties to Beijing and even froze American funding for the agency. In contrast to these harsh and accusing remarks, Xi Jinping, the president of China was more focused on international cooperation, Covid-19 management and recovery, and just bilateral agreements and negotiations. "We have no intention to fight either a Cold War or a hot one with any country." He explained, subtly indicating the US's ongoing apprehension against China. From an objective standpoint, it becomes easy to see what direction each state employed when conducting global diplomacy. While Trump was trying to shift the blame for his unpreparedness towards China, the latter was concentrated solely on finding solutions towards a faster recuperation. In the same Assembly, the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, stressed the fact that there had to be action taken to prevent the start of another Cold War, rigidly underlining that

"Our world cannot afford a future where the two largest economies split the globe in a great fracture - each with its own trade and financial rules and internet and artificial intelligence capacities."⁹⁹

Another aspect that is of equal importance for the analysis of Sino-US relations during the Covid-19 pandemic is the heavily disputed vaccine policy, a practice that has gained tremendous interest since the end of 2020, when various vaccines were successfully created and begun being distributed. As expected, the US and China are among the few states that have invested in the vaccine development process, another aspect from

⁹⁹ BBC.com, 2020, *UN General Assembly: US-China tensions flare over coronavirus*, Online: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-54253408#16164525162222&>, accessed: 21 March 2021.

which their bilateral relations can be explored as they tend to employ different diplomacy tactics. The US has funded several vaccine-candidates such as Moderna, Inovio, Johnson & Johnson, and BioNTech Pfizer as the governance wanted to ensure that they would be provided with a sufficient number of vaccine doses. China, on the other hand, has not been as open in supporting vaccines developed at a multi-national level and has opted for a more domestic approach, funding the state-owned Sinopharm vaccine and CanSino Biologics, which had initial ties to Canada.¹⁰⁰ As the list of vaccine options continues to broaden, the race to produce and distribute vaccines is occurring at a blistering pace. Succeeding to make various versions of the Covid-19 vaccine, has been regarded as nothing short of a scientific miracle, however, the tendency of politicizing even the most sensitive issues has affected the allotment of vaccines worldwide. Leading the race, China has been demonstrating its efficient coordination of state resources and its willingness to offer everyone a solution to the pandemic as opposed to other equally or even more developed world actors. The concept of “vaccine diplomacy” has become a buzzword used by media outlets when describing the development of the vaccine supplying process, however, Chinese officials have made it clear that they do not condone the term as its implications are “sinister” and allude to the idea that China is only distributing vaccines for a political purpose. Taking into account China’s “donation drive” from last year when approximately 150 countries benefitted from Chinese protective gear and other medical equipment and more than 170 countries were offered medical advice, it has become understandable the approach that China continues to take in the wake of this pandemic – international collaboration and support. Proving its health leadership worldwide, China has made it clear that distributing vaccines is not a political or economic-driven endeavor. It has been confirmed by now that China has supplied 69 developing countries with free Covid-19 vaccines while exporting profit-oriented vaccines in other 28 countries as part of its “Belt and Road Initiative”.¹⁰¹ Additionally, aiding low- and middle-income countries has been described by the Chinese president as

¹⁰⁰ J. Gardner, N. Pagliarulo, B. Fidler, 2021, *Coronavirus vaccines are rolling out quickly. Here's where the pipeline stands.*, Online: <https://www.biopharmadive.com/news/coronavirus-vaccine-pipeline-types/579122/>, accessed: 21 March 2021.

¹⁰¹ Yanzhong Huang, 2021, *Vaccine Diplomacy Is Paying Off for China*, Online: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-03-11/vaccine-diplomacy-paying-china>, accessed: 21 March 2021

being just one of the many responsibilities great powers have. However, the benefits that become China, regardless of its true geopolitical and financial objectives, shouldn't be downplayed or ignored. The pandemic has provided China with a chance to extend its contribution and its share of the pharmaceutical global market, which has been previously dominated by India and by Western countries. As more states choose the Chinese Covid-19 vaccines, due to their lower prices, easier storage requirements, and faster vaccination procedure, their competitors can only hope that China will not become more influential in exchange for their help.¹⁰²

A different approach to this international relations topic is taken by the US, which has employed its well-known "America First" strategy under the Trump administration. As the world looks to the new president, Joe Biden, to see what turn the vaccine distribution race will take under his leadership, Trump's vaccine policy continues to receive harsh critique. His diverted attention to the November 2020 presidential elections was just one of the causes that made the US take a step back in conducting foreign politics, letting China and Russia employ their own resources as a means of further improving bilateral relations. Focusing on their country to the extent that vaccine exports were neglected, caused frustration among the states in need as it seemed that the US was putting more effort into blocking China's strategies rather than looking to aid other countries. The Sino-US vaccine race in the Middle East is one example of tense international rapports, as logistics and politics will always be part of the reason why states choose to use one vaccine or the other, but the pressure the US exerted on its allies to avoid collaboration with China has not gone unnoticed.¹⁰³ However, as the US remained mostly uninvolved in the international arena and China proved itself to be extremely cooperative and hard-working, the prestige of Beijing is rising steadily, while the US's position as the top technological and scientific contributor is threatened. Joe Biden's policy does not seem to be so different from the former president's strategy, as the Biden administration is looking to cooperate with Japan, India, and Australia to provide the Asian countries with vaccines and to counter the ever-rising Chinese influence. Nonetheless, the pandemic is far

¹⁰² *Ibidem*.

¹⁰³ Guillaume Lavallée, 2021, *US, China face off in Middle East contest of coronavirus vaccine diplomacy*, Online: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-china-face-off-in-middle-east-contest-of-coronavirus-vaccine-diplomacy/>, accessed: 21 March 2021

from being over and the current international dynamics are bound to change and be altered by the further developments of the situation.¹⁰⁴

THE IMPACT OF THE SINO-US RELATIONS ON THE CITIZENS

The pandemic has unveiled various problems and shortcomings from which countries suffered, but it has also offered tailored insight on each society's issues and aspects which are in dire need of development. Unfortunately, every country's misgivings have been reflected in its population, which has had to endure economic uncertainties, political instability, and drastic societal changes. By taking a closer look and analyzing the events from a cause-and-effect perspective, it becomes clear that every decision taken by the leadership of a state, by an international organization, or any other multinational actor is mirrored in the lives of the people. This subchapter aims to describe the repercussions that both the US and the Chinese governments have had on their nation and how the people have reacted to their different rhetoric and courses of action.

China, as the second-largest economy in the world and a state which exudes thoroughness and proficiency, has been praised for handling this pandemic with conviction and seriousness. On January 23rd, 2020, the Wuhan province saw the first Covid-19 lockdown. At a global scale, the decision to immediately take action was praised and applauded by many of China's counterparts. However, this determination to fight the virus by immediately applying strict rules and rapidly modifying everyone's lives without much preparation has inflicted harm on the people on a deeper psychological level. This realization is oftentimes dismissed because its significance fades in comparison to the final objectives of the Chinese officials – containing and tackling the virus.

From January until July, harsh restrictions were imposed, and the enforcement of the rules was rigid and unrelenting. As this strategy proved to have a more successful outcome in contrast to other, more democratic societies, many believe that the importance of its negative effects on the citizens' lives wanes. The numerous measures taken by the government

¹⁰⁴ Reid Wilson, 2021, *US in talks with allies to counter China's vaccine diplomacy*, Online: <https://thehill.com/policy/international/541677-us-in-talks-with-allies-to-counter-chinas-vaccine-diplomacy>, accessed: 21 March 2021

also implied making people obey the restrictions as some were forced into quarantines and some were forbidden to post on social media about the mistreatments of the authorities.¹⁰⁵ One of the cases of silenced warnings, which produced massive grief and anger all across China was the case of Dr. Li Wenliang, who identified a SARS virus in November 2019 and posted his suspicions online to warn other doctors of the existence of a possible rapidly spreading disease. Immediately, he was accused of perturbing the “social order”. At the beginning of 2020, Dr. Li was diagnosed with the Covid-19 virus, but it was already too late. He died in the hospital after leaving an online post that described the symptoms of the virus and what treatment he was offered. Many paid him respect, calling him a “hero”.¹⁰⁶

The response of the Chinese government against people who spoke up about the situation in Wuhan, extended into a pattern, as journalists were silenced when trying to report on the life of the people in the province. One case that has gained attention overseas is the jailing of Zhang Zhan, a lawyer with an activist background. As soon as she found out about the pandemic, she took a train to Wuhan to truthfully document the conditions there. Her videos contained images and photos from hospitals and interviews with people who preferred to not have their identities disclosed. After the police warned her about spreading “rumors”, she continued to post content that gathered millions of views. “I think this is the true reality. So why can’t I film the truth?” she said in her most recent interview on May 3rd, 2020. In the same month, she had been sentenced to four years in jail for allegedly “picking quarrels and provoking trouble”.¹⁰⁷

Furthermore, a consequence of the Chinese government’s methods of managing the Covid-19 crisis has been the rise in the number of mental health disorders, especially among teenagers and medical staff. The focus provided for maintaining a physically healthy population has determined a depreciation in the mental wellness of several people, which accuse

¹⁰⁵ BBC.com, 2021, Wuhan lockdown: A year of China's fight against the Covid pandemic, Online: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-55628488>, accessed: 21 March 2021.

¹⁰⁶ BBC.com, 2020, Li Wenliang: Coronavirus death of Wuhan doctor sparks anger, Online: Li Wenliang: Coronavirus death of Wuhan doctor sparks anger - BBC News, accessed: 21 March 2021.

¹⁰⁷ BBC.com, 2020, Zhang Zhan: The 'rebellious soul' jailed for filming Wuhan, Online: Zhang Zhan: The 'rebellious soul' jailed for filming Wuhan - BBC News, accessed: 21 March 2021

depression, anxiety, and insomnia.¹⁰⁸ Due to the sudden change in lifestyle and the amount of misleading information on the internet, people have found it very hard to adapt and adjust to the new way of living. As some did not leave the house for months on end, it has become easier for people to be subjected to higher psychological distress. A research article published in October 2020 by BMC Public Health has described the attention that this particular medical sector needs especially in times of high stress.¹⁰⁹

In the US, the public was more vocal in their reactions regarding the pandemic as controversies marked the media¹¹⁰ and the public opinion alike.¹¹¹ Given the more liberal society, people were offered various channels of discussion, even if life itself had to occur mostly at home. The opinionated citizens had no limitations of speech, thus making it easy to spot a pattern in defying perspectives. While the health authorities were encouraging people to wear protective gear and remain at home as much as possible, the message spread by the president of the US at the time, Mr. Trump, made it harder for people to understand the real implications of this virus. There were multiple press conferences, before and after the pandemic begun, in which Trump assured the people that the virus was under control and stressed the fact that the recommendations of the health officials were voluntary and that everyone should choose whether to follow them or not. Trump himself has mostly avoided wearing a mask and has organized and led multiple public gatherings and rallies where only a few people wore any kind of protective equipment. When the situation worsened and states were forced into lockdown, some people manifested anger and resentment towards regulations and social distancing rules,

¹⁰⁸ Yun Li, Qingsong Qin, Qimeng Sun, 2020, *Insomnia and psychological reactions during the COVID-19 outbreak in China*, Online: <https://jcsn.aasm.org/doi/pdf/10.5664/jcsn.8524>, accessed: 21 March 2021.

¹⁰⁹ Ren, Z., Zhou, Y., Liu, Y., 2020, *The psychological burden experienced by Chinese citizens during the COVID-19 outbreak: prevalence and determinants*, Springer Nature, Online: <https://bmcpublihealth.biomedcentral.com/track/pdf/10.1186/s12889-020-09723-0.pdf>, accessed: 21 March 2021, pp. 9-10

¹¹⁰ Mark Sableman, 2020, *COVID-19 crisis news environment found full of contradictions and concerns*, Online: <https://www.thompsoncoburn.com/insights/blogs/internet-law-twists-turns/post/2020-06-23/covid-19-crisis-news-environment-found-full-of-contradictions-and-concerns>, accessed: 21 March 2021.

¹¹¹ Claudia Deane, Kim Parker, John Gramlich, 2021, *A Year of U.S. Public Opinion on the Coronavirus Pandemic*, Online: <https://www.pewresearch.org/2021/03/05/a-year-of-u-s-public-opinion-on-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>, accessed: 21 March 2021.

explaining that their freedom was being limited. Even if the initial lockdown lasted less than in other parts of the world, some citizens were already organizing anti-lockdown protests, while saying that the movement restrictions were hurting the people and their businesses needlessly. Michigan, Utah, Texas, Minnesota, and Washington are just some of the states in which these protests took place, while the protesters were mainly Trump supporters and pro-gun activists. Their signs were pleading for freedom and the return of life to normal. However, Trump refrained from condemning the protestors saying that "These people love our country, they want to get back to work."¹¹² This negligent attitude has made the protests escalate to people making a show of burning masks and posting videos of their gatherings on social media, hoping that their actions would encourage the authorities to bypass all health restrictions that have been put in place. This response may have also been fueled by the precarious economic environment from which a great number of Americans suffered. The extreme rise in unemployment in the US (from 6.2 million people in February to 20.5 million in May) is testimony to the careless governance that the Trump administration applied. If the unemployment rate rose as high as 13% at the end of spring, the winter holidays brought a deficiency in the number of relief packages available, leaving many without the minor help they were supposed to receive from the state.¹¹³

All the aforementioned examples provide the consequences of faulty governance and immediate civilian reactions to it. Regardless of the Coronavirus crisis, which has completely modified people's way of living, the citizens have not remained silent, some of them fighting for justice and freedom of speech, while others were battling an unstable economy and erratic actions from an unprepared administration.

¹¹² BBC.com, 2020, *Coronavirus lockdown protest: What's behind the US demonstrations?*, Online: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52359100>, accessed: 21 March 2021.

¹¹³ R. Kochhar, 2020, *Unemployment rose higher in three months of COVID-19 than it did in two years of the Great Recession*, Online: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/06/11/unemployment-rose-higher-in-three-months-of-covid-19-than-it-did-in-two-years-of-the-great-recession/>, accessed: 21 March 2021.

CONCLUSIONS

The world recalls the hardships of the last year, which was marked by social distancing, strict health regulations, and a constant online presence. Looking back, the quick enforcement of restrictions and the mobilization of resources have demonstrated the willingness of the states to contain and end the spread of the virus. Multinational cooperation, although unsteady at times, has brought major improvements and aid to the domestic situations of countries. Many aspects are worth discussing when handling such a broad subject. However, in what concerns the Sino-US dynamic certain characteristics have been underlined by their response to the pandemic. The tendency to politicize all encounters, even in times of crisis, has been visible from both states, even if China has managed to go about it more subtly. The containment of the virus by the Chinese government has become a successful Covid-19 story, yet this does not compensate for the misgivings that have happened, as China's tendency of being less than transparent has been a debated issue even before the beginning of the pandemic. At the same time, the US is constantly being criticized for its late and insensible handling of the virus, becoming a negative example on the global stage. Nonetheless, this does not alter the two states' positions as the most powerful global economies, leaving many states to choose between two powerhouses. The EU, for example, has been avoiding the idea of picking one state's side over the other as the international organization draws benefits from its collaboration with both countries. For the moment, the EU remains passive, trying to ignore this "Cold War mentality", as President Xi Jinping has referred to it, as much as possible. It is undeniable that the US and China will remain pillars of international cooperation, even though the divergencies between the countries are not bound to disappear any time soon. As both statal actors have tried to use the pandemic to their economic and political advantage, they continue to be the focus of international endeavors as the development of their collaboration remains a mere conjectural topic.

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